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# GREUZE AND HIS MODELS



# GREUZE AND HIS MODELS

by

JOHN RIVERS

*With Illustrations.*



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# GREUZE AND HIS MODELS

BY

JOHN RIVERS

AUTHOR OF "LOUVET: REVOLUTIONIST AND ROMANCE WRITER"

WITH 44 FULL-PAGE PLATES

LONDON

HUTCHINSON & CO.

PATERNOSTER ROW

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To

MY BROTHER WILL

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# GREUZE AND HIS MODELS

## CHAPTER I

### OF THE GREUZE GIRL

ALL the world knows her, and no one who has seen her can ever forget the sweet sting of her beauty. Her eyes are like the fishpools of Heshbon, and many a man has died happy for the kiss of a mouth such as hers. The noonday sunlight seems to have got entangled in her hair, and young men dream o' nights of her warm and palpitating throat. And, if with innocent effrontery, she delights in showing to the best advantage her dimpled arms, her firm and delicate hands and all the fresh graces of her rounded form, it is because she has just awakened to the life emotional; it is because her child's heart—the wide and troubled eyes confess it—has suddenly been thrilled and a little frightened by the eternal, delightful and foolish craving for something to love; and so, she lavishes the treasures of her heart on the pet lamb she holds in her arms, or the doves she fondly presses to her breast. She has reached that moment when the child, suddenly, miraculously,

blossoms into womanhood, and, knowing nothing of love, dreams the livelong day of nothing else. In the sympathetic insight Greuze displays in his presentment of this phase of womanhood, he is an unrivalled master. He painted these charming girls as though he loved them, and, to tell the truth, we should think none the less of him if he did. We can imagine him shouting with enthusiasm over the charms of his model; and, after each sitting, humbly kissing her hand at the door, with an "Adieu, my beautiful child!" as Ingres did after him.

The Greuze girl is the fairest flower that bloomed in the dawn of democratic art—a Venus of the common people of eighteenth-century Paris. The artist devoted all the resources of his talent to immortalise the type; and the gods rewarded his devotion, like that of another Pygmalion, by causing the sweet white flesh to glow and blossom into life under the caress of his brush. And so she became his for ever.

But this, according to some people, is merely the opinion of the young and inflammable. The cynics take a much more prosaic view of the matter. They object that Greuze painted a well-set-up young woman in daring déshabillé, who obviously knows as much as is good for her; a brazen hussy, practised in the art of throwing side-long glances over a broad expanse of white shoulder—a young and attractive female, in short, who, they dare say, is no better than she ought to be—and labels the picture *Innocence*. Greuze's critics imply that the innocence of the girls he delighted

INNOCENCE (p. 1)

(WALLACE COLLECTION, LONDON)

*Photo by Messrs. W. A. Mansell & Co., London*

INNOCENCE (Wallace Collection, London)



to paint was not perfect. It may be so; but of what profit are such investigations? Arid criticism of this kind leads nowhere, and comes of the pernicious habit we English have of comparing things belonging to different categories of thought, such as cows and hay-stacks, or funeral ceremonies and the practice of medicine.

The French, like other people, have their faults, but this is a mistake which they never make. They have a natural talent for taking a purely detached view of Art in all its branches; they do not mix up the notions of Art and Morality. Whether it be literature, painting, or music, they take Art for what it is, having too much wit to attempt to "apply" it. We, on our side, eye their yellow-backed novels with suspicion, and are frankly shocked at many of their pictures. It seems never to occur to us that we are possibly attaching an exaggerated importance to their romances, the *faits divers* columns of their journals, and the seamy-side of their politics. We are apt to forget that we are dealing with a nation which throughout the centuries has been in the forefront of every great intellectual movement, whether it be in Art, in Morals, or in Science. The great events of the world, it has been said, take place in the human mind; and, as often as not, that mind has been a French one. And it is just because English and French forget this, that we say they are immoral, whilst they say we are hypocritical. Doubtless they are wrong, but it is equally certain that we are not right. The difference lies in a confusion of the issues. And so,

all this talk of the veiled libertinism which is said to mar most of Greuze's pictures, is really beside the mark; for to take up this attitude is to deny the artist his ideal of beauty. You might as reasonably ask him to change his religion because you did not approve of the cut of his coat. To express his ideal as simply and as forcibly as he can is his *raison d'être* as an artist. It is open to us to accept or reject his pictures; but it is not open to us to make carping criticisms upon his ideals.

For the rest, you will not find beauty, any more than you will find innocence, by probing for it with a scalpel. It is a dangerous thing for a nation when a large section of it indulges this craving to analyse everything, which so often manifests itself in a stupid pleasure in gnawing beautiful things; for this worm-like instinct to pick holes in delicate fabrics is the sign of a profound and widespread pessimism, which, if allowed to go unchecked, will end by stifling Art with every other fruitful effort and generous enthusiasm. The most urgent need of our time is to preserve as our dearest possession everything that tends to stimulate our flagging vitality and ruthlessly to stamp out all that tends to enervate and discourage. To suffer the spirit of doubt in our consciences is to betray our trust and to admit the enemy within our gates. All that is great in Art, as in Life, is the product of a robust optimism.

Another, and certainly more reasonable, objection which has been urged against Greuze is that he had a harmful effect on French Art by introducing the tiresome practice of painting moral histories. There is

something in this; for the gravamen of the charge seems to be that he had no sense of humour. He had not; but he had wit. We can but regret that Greuze, following Hogarth, employed his art to point a moral and adorn a sermon, but this does not necessarily make his pictures bad art; nor, for that matter, does it make them any better. Fortunately, it was only a passing phase in the development of French Art; but, with us, Hogarth's example was directly responsible for the long and wearisome line of Victorian didactic pictures.

But whatever we may think on this matter, one important service French Art certainly does owe to Greuze. He was among the first to bring the serene and penetrating sweetness of the domestic life of the people into the realms of Art: he was among the earliest exponents of the latent poetry of pots and pans. In this respect, indeed, he is second to Chardin alone.

The highest achievements of that austere genius, however, failed to appeal to his contemporaries (in 1770, for instance, "The Benediction," one of his finest pictures, fetched only £36, whilst the pastel portraits of himself and his wife, now in the Louvre, were sold for twenty-four livres) and he has but lately come into his own. It is related that one day, when he happened to be in the studio of his life-long friend, Aved the portrait-painter, a lady called to ask Aved to paint her portrait, three-quarter length, and offered him four hundred livres (£16 13*s.* 4*d.*) for the work. Aved thought the sum too little, and refused. Whereupon, Chardin, used to more modest prices, expostulated with him for

losing such an opportunity, saying that four hundred livres were always worth earning. "Yes," answered Aved, "if a portrait were as easy to make as a sausage." Chardin was at that moment painting a chimney-board—a picture of a table, with a white cloth spread, and set with a jug, a bottle in an ice-pail, two glasses, one upside down, a knife, and a sausage on a silver dish. Stung by Aved's *mot* and fearing that the public were tiring of his studies of "still life," Chardin turned to figure painting, and soon became one of the greatest masters of the century, although, with his habitual modesty, it is doubtful if he ever suspected the fact.

Greuze, on the other hand, caught and reproduced just so much of the odour of domesticity as was tolerable to the light-hearted sensualists who, in his day, guided public opinion in Art and had practically limited painting to the pictorial record of the terrestrial junketings of the Immortals.

The significance of both painters lies in the fact that they were the first to protest against the tendency of the aristocracy to arrogate the realms of Art to themselves; and, although Chardin was the greater painter, it was nevertheless Greuze who, by his instinct for compromise, made easy the transition to a more popular conception of the functions of Art.

Each of these artists adopted the same theme, the everyday life of the people around him, with a certain bias in favour of the representation of women. Each recognised that every woman, in whatever circumstances she may be, instinctively creates a setting for herself;



and the characteristic *milieu* of the Greuze girl, as of the Chardin girl, is the home of the people. But nothing could differ more widely than the manner of treatment, or the particular type of woman each artist affected.

Turn over the pages of the memoirs and romances, the abundant histories of private families of the time; read the novels of Rousseau and Restif de la Bretonne; go where you will, and nowhere—not even in the vivid pages of Madame Roland herself—will you find such a sincere and faithful mirror, reflecting the woman of the people from her head to her heels, from her dress to her heart, as in the works of these two painters.

The Chardin girl is a serene, laborious, and wholesome little housewife, rather lacking in vivacity, perhaps, yet not without elegance and a touch of the poetry which clings to perfect moral and physical cleanliness, and the scrupulous performance of the simple duties of everyday life. We are made to feel that she will make a perfect mother, and a calmly affectionate wife to some honest but rather dull shopkeeper; and that her chief ambitions in life will be to give her man a good dinner punctually every day of the week, and to keep her home as bright as a new pin. We leave her with an intense impression of freshness, of cleanliness, of demureness.

The Greuze girl, on the other hand, will not be so easily contented: she will ask more of life, and is sufficiently determined to see that she gets it. Hotter blood runs in her veins. She will need more careful handling, or she may develop a tendency to kick over the traces. She is less domesticated, at once softer and more spirited;

her whole person exhaling, as it were, an atmosphere of virginal voluptuousness, of which Greuze alone had the secret.

All we can say of the man who can cavil at either type is that he is hard to please.

"Hartfield pork," said Jane Austen's Mr. Woodhouse, "is not like other pork—but still it is pork." And so we may say of the Greuze maiden, that she is not like other maidens; but still she is a maiden—though she has every appearance of knowing her way about.

## CHAPTER II

### OF THE INITIATION OF MONSIEUR GREUZE

GREUZE'S father, say all the earlier biographers, came of a good family of landowners in the vicinity of Châlons-sur-Saône, and was all his life proud of the fact that one member of the family had attained to the rank of Procureur du Roi. This, I think, having regard to the painter's character and disposition, was probably true, in spite of the scepticism of the de Goncourts. But the earlier writers go on to state that the father was himself an architect. Here they were certainly wrong: even biographers sometimes make mistakes. This is what the entry in the parish register of Tournus has to say on the subject:

"Jean, lawful son of Sieur Jean Louis Greuze, master tiler, living at the said Tournus, and of Claudine Roche, his wife, born the 21st August, 1725, was baptised the same day by me, curate as signed below; the sponsors were Sieur Jean Bézaud, also master tiler, and the Demoiselle Antoinette Auberut, wife of Hugues Brulé, baker in the said parish; all of whom have signed below, except the said godfather, who knows not how. Signed: J. L. Greuze, Antoinette Auberut, and Gornot, Curate." *

* Communicated to the de Goncourt Brothers by the then Mayor of Tournus.

Tournus is a pleasant little country town, on the Saône, twenty miles north of Mâcon, capital of the Department of Saône-et-Loire. A commemorative tablet now marks the house in which the future painter first saw the light ; the town possesses a large Greuze Museum ; and the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville is embellished with a fine marble statue in his honour, by Rougelet. The house is a very small one, little more than a cottage, in fact, but it has every appearance of having been a cosy and comfortable home. Jean Louis Greuze, the father, was rather above the average height, lean, broad-shouldered, strongly built : a good-looking man, who would in time grow into an even more handsome old man ; one of those noble-looking old fellows about whom his son afterwards delighted to group the figures in his pictures.

As for Greuze himself, when a child, he was one of the prettiest little creatures imaginable ; eyes of the colour of dreams, well-cut, moist red mouth, lily and rose complexion ; twin brother, in short, of that delightful little person holding an apple, in the picture which has found its way into our National Gallery.

When quite a small boy, we are told, he loved to take long walks by himself across the fields or into the woods ; to lie on his chest, by the hour together, watching the boats glide like graceful birds over the silver bosom of the Saône. The river fascinated him. Often he would climb to the top of one of the Lyonnais hills, simply for the pleasure of tracing its wandering course interminably ahead, until it was lost to view in the mysterious hills of



the purple South. His heart would leap with pure joy to see, from his resting-place, the dark, velvety shadows of the clouds chasing each other over the sunlit meadows, which swept upwards in every shade of vigorous green towards the streak of sapphire blue glistening on the horizon. He loved to listen to the singing poplars and the voices of the reapers rising from the cornfields. An ever-increasing taste for reverie and his own company welled up from the depths of his being; and he would sometimes become absorbed for a whole afternoon in the movements of the sleek cows and plump horses, with tufted fetlocks and sweeping tails, which lazily munched the grass down at the water's edge; or in the great grey wings of a windmill steadily threshing the air. And so, after idling away a whole day, he would walk slowly homewards as the setting sun trailed a golden glory over the West. Another time, he would launch a little boat, which he had fashioned with his own hands, and escort it in imagination as it sailed bravely down the stream, with its cargo of romance, towards "the foam of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

It was then, as it continued all his life long, easy for him to reach the kingdom of dreams. He had only to climb into the loft where his father stored the tiles, to be in another world, far from the hens, which he thought made a great clatter over such small eggs, and his mother's maid-of-all-work, who stood in the doorway, bare-armed, and hissing like an ostler, as she scoured the copper saucepan which glistened in her hands.

Everything interested him. Once, when his godmother, Antoinette Brulé, on the fête of St. Nicolas, gave him a repulsive-looking wooden puppet, with a highly improbable red and yellow complexion, a convivial nose, tow head, and lobster eyes, the boy spent the whole day admiring the bright colours of his toy; but, instead of making it work its arms and legs, as its creator intended, by means of the string which passed through its trunk, little Greuze amused himself by setting it up first in one position, then another, observing how it changed colour as seen by firelight, in sunlight, or in shadow.

In the long winter evenings, the neighbours would come to drink a glass and chat with the boy's father. The guests grouped themselves round the huge fireplace, sitting up stiffly on heavy chairs or forms. The fire darted great flashes of light upon the ancient furniture, the goodwife's earthenware and polished copper household utensils, the massive brass candlesticks, and into the dark recesses of the ceiling, from the joists of which hung a rude iron lantern, a row of smoked hams, strings of black sausages and bunches of Spanish onions. An oil lamp, burning on the sideboard, flickered and spluttered as the door opened on each new arrival. And all these forms and colours stamped themselves indelibly on the lad's memory.

Above all, the young servant girl, seated in a corner, winding wool, with her pale blonde hair and languorous eyes, seemed to little Greuze to have suddenly become quite beautiful in that transilient light and reminded

him of the twelfth-century Byzantine statue of the Virgin, carved in wood at the head of a mutilated tomb which stands in the Church of St. Philibert in Tournus. He half-closed his eyes in order to see her more dimly, and so heighten her resemblance to the statue.

One Twelfth Day, Jean Baptiste was invited by his godparents, the Brulés, to share in the festival of the *Gâteau des Rois*. This was one of the most widely popular ceremonies of the year in old-time France, and was celebrated in honour of the Wise Men of the East, popularly known as the Three Kings. Every household, however poor, on this occasion made a large cake, in which a bean was inserted, and the family and guests being assembled, the cake was divided by lot, and whoever got the piece containing the bean was accepted as King for the day and called *Roi de la Fève*, or King of the Bean. The importance of the ceremony is indicated by the proverbial phrase for good luck, " Il a trouvé la fève au gâteau "—he has found the bean in the cake. Early in the afternoon, little Greuze, having donned his best clothes and his mother having carefully goose-greased his hair, set out hand in hand with the blonde-haired servant girl, Annette, in her white apron, her pink and white face peeping out from her dazzling, beribboned, linen cap. As they tripped along, their eyes shone with excitement.

Suddenly the boy said :

" When I'm a man, I shall marry you ! "

Annette blushed and pressed his hand, she was only a child herself.

"Jean, Jean, you mustn't say such things!"

If she was annoyed, she succeeded in hiding it very well, and, as they reached the baker's, she swiftly bent, and kissed the boy's mouth; then she knocked at the door.

Little Greuze never forgot that day. The incidents of the festival, down to the minutest details of form and colour, seemed to burn themselves into his brain, to be reproduced many years afterwards with extraordinary fidelity in one of the painter's most charming domestic pictures, *Le Gâteau des Rois.*

During the long winter evenings of his boyhood, when there were no visitors, his father would read aloud to his assembled family a chapter from a folio Bible, printed in black-faced type and full of naïve engravings. It was certainly an unusual book to find in a Catholic household. Whether or not the Greuzes had leanings towards Protestantism, I do not know. If they had, the fact that they possessed this Bible and the general tendency of Greuze's character and art constitute the only evidence, such as it is, in support of this surmise.

When the good man had finished, he would sit for a long time with the great book open upon his knees, thinking of the words he had just been reading. Another picture which the little boy, with the pensive blue eyes, treasured in his memory for future use! The fidelity with which his brain recorded this scene was destined to make his fortune.

Sometimes, when the weather was too bad for the



lad to go out, his father would hand him the Bible, that he might amuse himself looking at the pictures; and he would spend hours on end enthusiastically admiring the naïve engravings.

There was a picture of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Eve appeared to be looking for her clothes, and wondering whether the crocodile or the hippopotamus had eaten them; whilst Adam, with a rueful expression on his countenance—as though, whilst enjoying the forbidden apple, he had come suddenly upon the wriggling half of a maggot and surmised the fate of the other half—pointed furtively over his shoulder at Eve, as who should say, to propitiate the accuser: "Please, Sir, it wasn't me! She did it!" Then there was Noah, with an unprepossessing and shrewish-looking wife, passing in review the animals as they went into the Ark; and Solomon, seated on a gorgeous throne, holding a plump, struggling infant in one hand, and preparing to slice it in half with a sword held in the other. The boy was terrified by the ferocious looking soldiers slaying the Amalekites, and marvelled to see fat women, with wings on their backs, flying about in the air, blowing long trumpets. But, most of all, he was impressed by the grim figure of Peter, holding in his hand the keys of Heaven, and he wondered what that Apostle would say to his godfather Bézaud, who had just died, when the latter stood before him.

Then, one day, when his father had been called away to repair the roof of a château at Uchizy-Chardonnay, about five miles from Tournus, the desire seized the boy

to copy these pictures. The idea had no sooner occurred to him than he set about its execution. In order that he might not be disturbed, he climbed into the loft—his "kingdom of dreams"—with the folio Bible, a sheet of paper, a goose-quill and some ink. Then, with a dry throat and a beating heart, he set feverishly to work.

With a trembling hand, he began to copy the picture of Adam and Eve being driven from the Garden of Eden. Since the figures he drew had no clothes on, it was difficult to tell the first man from the first woman, and the artist had unintentionally ornamented the left cheek of one of the couple with a big round blot of ink, completely shutting out the light from that eye; whilst the Serpent, coiled round a tree on the right of the picture, looked as though his vegetarian diet had not agreed with him. But in spite of these little *contretemps*, the boy had never been so happy in his life. When he had given the finishing touch to the drawing, he hid it among the tiles. He was then eight years old.*

Instead of playing like other children, little Greuze amused himself by secretly copying the Bible pictures one after another. Even then he dreamed of one day becoming an artist. But the master tiler had already made up his mind as to his son's future; he intended him to be an architect. And as the years passed by, and still his father held firm, Jean Baptiste, like the infant Mozart, took to getting up in the night, when

* *See* Madame C. de Valori. Notice on Greuze attached to her play *Greuze, ou l'Accordée du Village*. Paris, 1813; and reprinted in the *Revue Universelle des Arts*. Vol. XI., pp. 248 *et seq.* and 363 *et seq.*

every one in the house was asleep, to practise his beloved art by the light of a stolen candle.

Once, when he had drawn a picture of which he was specially proud, he could not resist the temptation of showing it to his father.

"Father," said Jean Baptiste, "I have something to show you. Look, I did this all by myself!" He put the paper into the tiler's hands.

His father smiled, and patted him on the shoulder.

"Very good, my boy; very good! But you mustn't waste your time on this sort of thing. You are going to be an architect, you know." Then, turning to his wife, he said:

"Well, mother, have you got something good for dinner to-day?"

And that was all!

But, in spite of his bitter disappointment, Jean Baptiste worked steadily on with the dogged perseverance which distinguished him throughout his career. The night-work began to tell on his health. Dark circles formed under his eyes; he became nervous and irritable. His father and mother became alarmed.

"What is the matter with you, my boy?" abruptly asked his father one day. "You are unsettled and no longer seem to take interest in anything. You must try to pull yourself together, for you will soon have to go to Mâcon to serve your apprenticeship."

Jean Baptiste decided to tell of the secret ambition which was eating his heart out.

"I don't want to be an architect," he murmured,

"I want to be an artist. To paint pictures is the only thing I shall ever care about!"

"An artist!" cried the master tiler. "My poor boy, it is not for people such as we are to become artists. How do you suppose you are going to earn your living?"

"Oh, trust me! I shall work hard, day and night if necessary!"

"Do you think you will grow rich by painting pictures? There are too many pictures in the world already. You had better by half go to Mâcon, and learn to build houses, and (who knows?) some day you may build a cathedral. Besides . . ." he hesitated; "there are other objections. . ."

His austere, puritanical soul revolted at the thought of his son sharing in the licence of the Parisian studios. He trembled to think of his boy, at the dangerous age, living far from home, among shameless women models, loose in their speech and looser still in their habits. A look of suffering came over his face.

"I have given you pain," murmured the sensitive Jean Baptiste.

"Never mind, my boy; let us speak no more about it."

Another year passed, and Jean Baptiste determined to make a last effort to change his father's decision. He set to work to draw, with all his skill, a head of St. Jacques, which he intended to give the tiler upon his *fête* day. He worked as though his very life depended upon the result—as indeed it did. He sketched in the features with a light, firm touch. No casual ink-stain blotted the light from the eyes of this Saint. The



boy's hand no longer shook. In those long, bitter years young Greuze had mastered his craft.

On the great day, trembling with emotion, he handed the drawing to his father.

"Where did you get this engraving?" asked the tiler.

"I am again the culprit, father!"

"No; surely it is an engraving!" Then, looking carefully into the drawing, he noticed here and there the marks of the pen. He could not conceal his admiration of the little masterpiece, for it was no less. He realised for the first time that it would be useless any longer to oppose his son's wishes.*

A few weeks later, a man named Grandon, a sort of a painter, living at Lyons, called upon the tiler, whose acquaintance he had made some years before. Grandon was invited to stay the night, and accepted. Jean Louis spoke of his son's ambition, and Grandon asked to see some of the lad's drawings. On the strength of what he saw, he agreed to take Jean Baptiste home with him, to serve as an assistant in the "picture factory"—the phrase is Greuze's own—which he conducted at Lyons. Grandon's painting, as may be implied from Greuze's terse description of his establishment, had almost as little relation to Art as that of the man whom Madame Vigée Lebrun met whilst on a visit to the Marquise de Villette —Voltaire's "Belle et Bonne." The most famous of women artists was one day taking a walk with her host

* *See* Madame C. de Valori. *Ibid.*

and hostess, when they came across a man painting fences in the park. The painter was working with such expedition that M. de Villette complimented him upon it.

"Yes," replied the man, standing back and complacently eyeing his handiwork; "I am a good painter, there is no doubt about that. Why," he continued with growing enthusiasm, "I would undertake to cover up in a day all that Rubens painted in his whole life." *

The painter was one in a thousand, a man after Grandon's own heart, and we can but regret the circumstance that the pair missed each other.

At his "factory" in the capital of the South, Grandon employed half-a-dozen lads, who daubed pictures from morning till night. Greuze joined the staff, and learned to turn out a picture a week, though it sometimes happened that he painted one in a day. To his other activities Grandon added periodical expeditions into the country around Lyons, wandering from inn to inn in the hope of picking up a few francs by painting the portraits of mine host and his buxom wife and daughters. He was, in fact, an itinerant dauber, like Christopher Steele, to whom young Romney was apprenticed, or the immortal limner who, in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, painted the seven Miss Flamboroughs, "each with an orange in her hand." And, as Greuze had even thus early shown a special talent for portraiture, he often accompanied his master on these excursions.

* *See Memoirs of Madame Vigée Lebrun*, translated by Lionel Strachey, pp. 48–9.

Now, in spite of all that the critics have urged against this furiously hurried production, I, for one, hold that in Greuze's case at least, this was an invaluable training. In Art, it is not always the rapidly executed work which is the least satisfactory. The masterpieces of Shakespeare and Molière, of Balzac and Dickens, of Rembrandt and Velasquez—to name only a few among the moderns—were all executed with the greatest rapidity. No artist of the robust individuality of a Greuze is spoiled by a certain amount of "collar work" of this kind in his youth. On the contrary, it is just this sort of compulsion that he stands most urgently in need of, since there is nothing that serves better to bring his imagination into focus. The worst enemies of the creative artist are inherent in his own nature, and if he means to do anything, they will have to be fought and conquered while he is still young.

Perhaps the most insidious of his foes is a habit of mistaking dreams for thoughts. The young painter, writer, or musician cannot possibly learn to make this distinction too soon. How many a youth of promise has lost his way in the mists of the dreamland through which every original artist must pass on his journey towards the sunlit slopes of Parnassus!

Any kind of discipline, therefore, however rude, which compels him to fix his wandering fancies, to translate his vague thoughts into definite forms, swiftly and simply, before the first freshness of the impression has had time to fade—any sort of training, in short, which forces him to complete whatever piece of work he has

begun—so far from being harmful, is all to the good, as this makes for coherence and self-realisation, and will do more than anything else to keep his art in touch with the life around him.

Unbounded liberty is not for all artistic temperaments. Indeed, it is an open question whether most young artists would not be happier and produce better work under some form of constraint. Théophile Gautier —an artist to his finger tips, if ever there was one—felt this truth so strongly that, when, as a young man, he conceived the idea of writing *Mademoiselle de Maupin*— the "golden book of beauty," as Swinburne called it— he caused his friends to lock him in his room and refuse to let him out until he had completed the manuscript of his romance.

And so, it may well have been that the weary years of drudgery which Greuze spent in the Lyons "picture factory" were not wasted, but served a useful purpose in his artistic development.

"The law of Art," says Balzac, "as that of Life, is work"; and whatever else Greuze learnt in those years he certainly mastered that particular lesson.

He also learnt something of another of Life's lessons, for it was during the term of his servitude to Grandon that his heart was awakened and fertilised by the warm breath of passion. Till then his artist's soul had dwelt apart, as though listening for the beating of Love's wings, before making its first flight towards immortality.

"It may be admitted," says Grétry, the operatic composer, in his *Essai sur la Musique*, "that in the

exact and abstract sciences, and in philosophy, the fruits of experience may go on increasing with a man's age; but the great works of the imagination have, almost without exception, been conceived and brought to fruition in the age of Love. Voltaire," he continues, "would not have written *Zaïre* and *La Pucelle* in later life." It is true; he would not. And so was it with our artist. It appears that Grandon was the father of Jeannette—a pretty woman and a better painter than her sire—who afterwards became Grétry's wife. But the story is the composer's, and he shall tell it in his own way.

"Greuze," he writes, "even when little more than a child (as the pupil of Grandon, my wife's father) often said: 'I must paint a picture of a father in the midst of his family,' and he did so. Since that time he meditated upon this subject continually, whilst his heart burned secretly and respectfully for his master's wife, who was a very beautiful woman. My wife, very young at that time, finding him one day lying on the floor of the studio, asked him what he was doing. 'I am looking for something,' he replied. But she saw that he was pressing to his heart one of her mother's shoes, which he was devouring with kisses. Nevertheless," adds the musician, "Greuze was right. He was looking for something; and it was the genius of his art that he found." *

I do not know that the anecdote proves much, except that Jeannette was a little cat, and that Greuze was

* *See* Grétry (André) *Essai sur la Musique; ou Mémoires.* Vol. II., p. 172.

an incurable romantic, a fact which every one knew already.

Jean Baptiste was a little over twenty years old when he painted the picture which had slowly germinated in his mind during all those years.

Alone and in silence, working chiefly from memory, in odd moments snatched from sleep or meal times, occasionally with models, but more often without, with nobody to offer him sympathy or guidance—it was thus that young Greuze painted the picture which was destined to make his name.

The work filled Grandon with astonishment; he was one of those unperceptive persons who always are astonished that any one whom they have known half their lives should be capable of doing anything out of the common.

"Go," said he. "You are a great painter; you are only wasting your time here!"

So Greuze went.

He packed up his scanty belongings, and took the coach to Paris, bringing with him his dreams, his ambition, a thoroughly individual, though as yet unripe, talent, and his first real picture, *The Father of a Family explaining the Bible*, but that picture, if there is any meaning in the term, was a masterpiece.*

* Madame de Valori. *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER III

### HOW MONSIEUR GREUZE CAME TO PARIS IN SEARCH OF HIS IDEAL AND FOUND HIMSELF

When the young painter from Lyons reached Paris, he found that it was Boucher's hour. By dint of a prodigious fertility and ingenuity in weaving garlands of sleek goddesses and rosy-limbed Cupids across the ceilings of the aristocratic salons of Paris, Boucher had won fame and the proud, though unofficial, position of Painter-in-Ordinary to the King's playfellow.

Now, although there have been greater painters than François Boucher, even among his contemporaries, he holds a more important position in the eyes of posterity than his talents exactly warrant, by reason of the fact that he is in a supreme degree the pictorial chronicler of the gay, gallant, and decadent society, which, with such exquisite grace, danced on the edge of the volcano, under the smiling and indulgent patronage of Louis the Well-Beloved, and the fascinating woman who virtually shared his throne and actually ruled his life. "This painter," says Desboulmiers, who wrote the appreciation of the artist, after his death, for the *Mercure de France*, "this painter must of necessity mark an epoch in the

French School." It is this fact which gives him such great interest for us.

"Boucher is one of those men," say the de Goncourts, "who typify the taste of a century, who express it, personify it, and incarnate it. The French taste in the eighteenth century is manifested in him in every particular of its character: Boucher will remain not only its painter, but its witness, its representative, its type." *

Under the *Grand Monarque,* French Art had taken on something of the empty grandeur and conventional nobility which sought to imprison the Beautiful in solemn forms and ceremonies, to put it into leading-strings, to fix it with a label. To the stilted age of Louis XIV succeeded the gallant age of Louis XV, and Royalty becoming more human, men and things became smaller; and while the ideal in Art remained factitious and conventional, it declined from the majestic to the agreeable. The same phenomenon is noticeable in the theatres, the books, the pictures, the sculpture, the houses and the decoration of private apartments; all the arts, in short, take on an air of coquetry and softness, the prettiness and seductiveness of a dying tradition. Prettiness is the essence and the formula of its genius. Prettiness of manner, of dress, of speech. Prettiness is the soul of the time, and its most characteristic painter is Boucher.

After a youth passed in a servitude almost as arduous as that which had embittered Greuze's early years, Boucher had been fortunate enough to attract and hold

* *See* Goncourt (E. et J. de) *L'Art du XVIIIe Siècle.* Boucher.

the intimate friendship of the fascinating Marquise whose smiling elegance he has immortalised. From the favourite's first steps in the progress which began with the caprice of a night and ended with the almost undisputed control of a reign, Madame de Pompadour took possession of, and attached to her suite, the adroit painter of the facile loves of the Immortals. The woman and the artist seem to have been born for each other. It was as though Nature had intended Boucher to be her courtier, her poet, her historian. He illustrates and reveals her to us in all her grace, her daintiness, her incomparable charm. She inspired his works, made his fortune, and gave her name to the style of art of which he was the greatest exponent. He translated, as none other could, her laughing and voluptuous dreams into pictures of languorous goddesses playing the wanton, or stretching their white limbs, in indiscreet attitudes, on the sleek clouds of Cythera, which his gay brush unrolled, like the carpet of some Celestial harem, to receive them.

"The severity of the nude," as the de Goncourts truly say, "is quite unknown to Boucher: he knows not how to robe a woman's form in its beauty, nor how to veil it in its modesty; the flesh he exposes has, as it were, a piquant effrontery; his goddesses, his nymphs, his Nereids, his nude women, are always undressed women. But who has ever undressed women as he has done? The Venus of whom Boucher dreams and whom he paints is only the physical Venus, but how he knows her by heart! How cleverly he suggests all the seductions of

yielding gesture, of facile smile, and engaging provocation! . . . Boucher lacked one high quality," they proceed, " the sign manual of great painters: distinction. It is in this that he falls so far short of Watteau, with whom the world so readily couples and classes him, as if there were no disparity between Boucher and the master who has elevated the mind to the height of style. Elegant vulgarity: that is the sign of Boucher." *

The timid young man fresh from Grandon's picture factory, who had grown robust and healthy in the free, pungent air of the Lyonnais, found it difficult to breathe in this heavy atmosphere, surcharged with the irritating perfumes of the seraglio. He could make nothing of these nudities in which the colour scheme seemed invariably to be made up of " rose leaves swimming in milk." These pictures of court gallants, masquerading as shepherds, dallying with a scented and powdered Amaryllis grown wanton in the shade, left him cold. He did not understand them. How should he? Like Géronte, he wondered what the deuce those perfumed marquises were doing in that galley. The reeling goddess with the zoneless waist, who inspired the art around him, had no message for him; or, if she had, it was in an unknown tongue of which he would never have the key. That ideal of beauty was not his; and so, with a shrug of the shoulders, he turned his back upon it. His brush should be consecrated to a worthier service. He felt obscurely quickening within him an ideal of beauty

* Goncourt (E. et J. de) *L'Art du XVIIIe Siècle.* Boucher.

which should have as little as possible in common with the Muse of Boucher; an ideal which should bring Art into a relation less remote from the life around him. His Muse was a sort of glorified schoolmistress, who, however, had by no means given up her pretensions to please—she had every appearance of being frolicsome enough out of school hours; but whether people found her agreeable or not, she was determined to instruct them and improve their manners. When the corrupt man went to an exhibition, his conscience should prick him, and he should read his own condemnation in the pictures upon the walls. "If his steps conduct him to the Salon," says Diderot, "let him fear to look at the canvases." Greuze, to use the same writer's apposite though rather brutal phrase, had brought from the country nothing but a taste of his shoe leather for Boucher's rosy Cupids.

Alone in the heart of the great city, timid, proud, friendless, lacking everything but the bare necessities of life, and toiling at pot-boilers to win even so much, Greuze set to work, obstinately, savagely, determined at all costs to win fame and riches, and, if possible, at the same time to improve the morals of the rich by setting before them attractive pictures of the domestic virtues as exemplified in the lives of the poor. There was room for improvement, no doubt; and when the new painter was at length brought to their notice, they showed their appreciation of his efforts on their behalf by readily buying his pictures.

Greuze lived at a time when the taste for glory was a real incentive to great effort, a period when the plebeian could trust to fame alone to overcome the prejudices of caste. Even his characteristic faults of self-sufficiency and a rather aggressive vanity helped him in the stern fight he was waging. Poverty and the will-to-live developed in his proud, shy, but headstrong nature, resources of energy and patience until then unsuspected. In the obscurity of those years he learned to know himself, determined exactly what he meant to do, and laboriously set himself to acquire those qualities which would enable him to carry out his scheme of life. He became a skilful psychologist, and it was precisely the psychological sense which was destined to predominate in his art.

That Greuze had, even thus early, acquired something of this knowledge is proved by the picture *The Father of a Family explaining the Bible*, which he had carefully stowed away in his garret, until he should feel that the time had come to produce it. This was a picture which had all the qualities calculated to determine the course of a new movement in Art ; to symbolise the new era, in which the heroes of classical tragedy were dethroned by the heroes of contemporary domestic drama. Soon, very soon, the sentiment of the age would veer round into the direction in which Greuze's special talent lay. The elegant triflers and dainty ladies would soon begin to take the same sensual delight in the contemplation of virtue which they now took, and would continue to take, in the active pursuit of vice. Crébillon *fils* and Choderlos



de Laclos would give way to Rousseau and Diderot; Boucher and Baudouin to Greuze and Chardin. And in that time Greuze, at least, would become the social rival of the wealthy painters of the King's sweethearts. It was a sign that the first whiff of the Revolution was already in the air; the Angel was already stirring the waters, and the time was not far distant when the gospel according to St. Jean-Jacques would be promulgated at the point of the knife.

Let us examine this picture in detail.

In the lofty living room of a raftered cottage—a peasant's home of the humblest description—an austere, robust, and healthy-looking old man, whose grey hair falls in untidy ringlets upon his shoulders—a village patriarch, bearing a striking resemblance to a well-known portrait of Benjamin Franklin—is seated, cross-legged, at a low, clumsily constructed table, with a great folio Bible before him. One of his large, strong hands toys with the horn spectacles which he has just taken off, whilst the other rests lightly on the passage in the volume which he is expounding. He is dressed in a loose great-coat, shabby knee breeches, light coloured stockings, and heavy, buckled shoes. He might be a small tenant farmer, and is certainly an upright, God-fearing man in the Calvinistic way, of the type whom Restif de la Bretonne has drawn as the central figure in his *Vie de mon Père*—a fine handsome old fellow as ever you could wish to see; but not one, I imagine, who would readily smoke a jest, not particularly entertaining company, rather a dull dog, in short. The waning sun casts a

subdued light and soft shadows into the innermost recesses of the room, and touches with pale gold the bird-cage high on the wall, the ingle-neuk, the large copper pans on the mantelshelf, a decanter, the side of a kneading-trough. On the ground by the table lie in disarray a large flat basket, containing a white cloth, an earthenware milk pot and a big copper vessel. Around the old man are grouped eight persons. A boy just in his teens hangs over his father's shoulder, looking rather scared, as though what he had just heard fitted his case too well for his comfort ; a younger child by the old man's side listens attentively ; he has no qualms of conscience. The eldest son stands with clasped hands facing the reader ; his long fair hair is parted at the side under his three-cornered hat, his mouth is pursed up, and he has a gloomy, almost fanatical expression on his face. By his side sits the mother, a fair, round woman, with a bovine smile, resting her head on her fine arm ; and by her kneels the only daughter, a girl of generous proportions and a pleasant face like her mother : both are listening intently and meditating on what they are hearing. Between the two women stands a small golden-haired boy, stretching a pretty little arm over the table. In the foreground to the left of the picture a mischievous-looking urchin with flaxen hair, bored by the reading, tries to tease the dozing shepherd's dog stretched at his feet, whilst the mild faced old grandmother, holding her distaff in one hand, gently shakes his arm with the other to restrain him.

When the painting came to be engraved by Lyreux,

the artist drove home the moral in the following verses at the foot of the plate :

Le silence, l'attention
Que portent mère, fils et fille
À la naïve instruction
De ce bon Père de famille

Devraient bien apprendre aux Docteurs
Que les leçons de l'innocence
Ont plus de pouvoir sur les cœurs,
Que toute leur vaine éloquence.*

That is all ; but this picture spelt a revolution in Art.

It is not difficult to imagine the effect of this piece of real life, sympathetically observed and reproduced with masterly firmness and simplicity by a brush guided by fervent conviction and a genuine emotion, suddenly appearing in the midst of an art devoted to the portrayal of the secret meetings, the factitious courtships and carefully arranged indiscretions, the easy capitulations and furtive love episodes which would have no morrow, set against a background of luxurious upholstery, or the painted groves and gardens of Cythera.

Almost from the day of his arrival, Greuze attended the drawing classes at the Academy, earning the money for his fees by painting tradesmen's sign-boards and little canvases by the score for the dealers, as La Tour and Chardin and even Watteau had done before him ; or sometimes he had the good fortune to sell a picture

* The silence, the attention which mother, sons and daughter give to the naïve instruction of this good Father of a family ought to teach the Doctors that the lessons of innocence have more power over hearts than all their vain eloquence.

to one of the fine gentlemen who came to the *Exposition des Jeunes* which, since 1725, was held in the open air, under the shadow of the trees in the Place Dauphine, reached from the Pont Neuf by an obscure passage passing by the side of the house in which the future Madame Roland was to live—one of the pleasantest spots in Paris to this day. Nearly all the artists of the middle of the century had exhibited at one time or another in that extemporised Salon. It was here that De Troye the younger had brought his famous picture *Renaud et Armide,* Oudry his wolf-hunting scene, Nattier his portrait of Maurice de Saxe in armour, Chardin many of his most brilliant studies of still life; and it was here, as a contemporary says, that "Sieur Bouchet (*sic*) pupil of Sieur Lemoine" had, at the outset of his career, exhibited a picture "painted with a very good feeling for colour, which causes us to hope that this young man will excel in his art."

It was at this time that Greuze made the acquaintance of Pigalle, and with this great sculptor lies the credit of being the first to divine the young painter's quality, and to comfort him by the assurance that he had a brilliant future before him. Apart from this encouragement, however, he met with nothing but ill-will, jealousy, and open hostility from his fellow pupils at the Academy. It must be admitted that he brought a great many of his troubles upon himself by his criticisms, which habitually erred on the side of candour and vividness, and by his undisguised contempt for the works of even the most famous of his contemporaries. Moreover, he was shy,

awkward, always in deadly earnest, and of an extreme touchiness; and each of these qualities can easily be mistaken for pride, and readily lends itself to ridicule. The professors also completely failed to understand him, and although they recognised his talent, relegated him to the worst place in the whole class.* These humiliations did not tend to improve his temper or to soften the natural acridity of his tongue. He treated his teachers with a haughtiness which was calculated to try the patience of the most indulgent.

At length, exasperated beyond endurance by the humiliations to which he was constantly subjected at the schools, the young artist took his courage in both hands, and carried a selection of his paintings to Louis Sylvestre—the charming old fellow, with his head tied up in a pudding cloth, who looks out with so friendly an air from La Tour's portrait—one of those masterly pastels now at the Saint Quentin Museum, of which Diderot said "that a brush of the wing of Time would suffice to carry away their dust, and to make the artist more than a mere name"; though, happily, they have proved as durable as the critic's own admirable word-pictures. Sylvestre was a man of great influence, Director of the Academy, and former drawing master to the Royal Princesses. The generous old man was delighted with what he saw, and straightway took a fancy to the young man who had come to him for sympathy and help. Greuze, who always had a talent for business, then asked permission to paint his new friend's portrait.

* Madame C. de Valori. *Ibid.*

The proposal apparently flattered the old man, and he readily granted the request; and Greuze exultantly executed the portrait under the very eyes of his envious fellow pupils. That was his first step out of the shadow. From that day Sylvestre proved himself a warm friend and patron of the young artist.

About this time there arose, first in the Art world and then in Court circles, a mysterious rumour, a vague curiosity respecting the newly discovered artist who painted tender domestic scenes and the heads of enchanting girls.

M. de la Live de Jully, a rich and discerning art collector—one of those men of taste and intelligence who hang about studios, and from time to time find amusement in raising a poor devil out of the dust and creating, after the manner of the Immortals, somebody out of nobody in particular—chose this moment to purchase the picture *The Father of a Family explaining the Bible.* He did more. He turned his house into a sort of public gallery, and invited all the artists and art-lovers of his acquaintance to come and see his new acquisition. Artistic Paris flocked to the house, and soon the name of Greuze was in every one's mouth.

Diderot, ever on the look out for new ideas, also went to see the picture, and was carried away by enthusiasm, for he recognised in Greuze a painter after his own heart. Such was the origin of a fruitful friendship which, though often jeopardised by the pungency and downright brutality of some of Diderot's criticisms, was destined to last until severed by death. It was Greuze's

pictures which inspired the great Encyclopædist to write those wonderful causeries, the *Salons de Peinture*, which really originated in France that highest kind of criticism which treats a work of art simply as a starting point for a new creation.

On the recommendation of Sylvestre, Greuze was elected to the Academy on June 28, 1755; and at the Salon of the same year, he exhibited the picture which had won him fame, the *Aveugle Trompé*, a study of a boy's head, and the portraits of his friends Sylvestre and Lebas, one of the King's Engravers.

"We find in these pictures," says the author of *Letters on the Salon of 1755*, "all those qualities which cannot be acquired; genius shows itself at every step. The superior talents of Monsieur Greuze make all who have seen his pictures wish that the artist would raise his Muse to a rather more noble style. There is every reason to believe that he is capable of doing something greater. However, it is for him to consult his own strength, *quid valeant humeri*; it is his genius that he must follow; not the ideas of the public." The critic, after expressing his admiration for the individuality and sureness of his touch, reproaches him that some of his faces border on caricature.

*The Father of a Family explaining the Bible* proved to be the picture of the year; and during the whole time that the exhibition was open the canvas was surrounded by crowds of admiring people.

The hitherto unknown painter had stepped into the sunshine at last.

## CHAPTER IV

### OF THE BOOKSHOP ON THE QUAI DES AUGUSTINS

HAVING, in a previous chapter, stated the two points of view commonly held respecting the Greuze girl, I must leave the reader to draw his own conclusion in the matter. Personally, I have neither the time nor the courage, at this stage of the narrative, to allow myself to be inveigled into an argument; and so, without more ado, I will introduce the reader to Mademoiselle Anne Gabrielle Babuti, the original of both portraits, when, as a young girl, she kept her father's shop on the Quai des Augustins, and sold books and journals, and chatted and flirted with the incipient authors, artists, and philosophers of the Latin Quarter.

Here in this dingy shop, lined with pine book-shelves, which groaned and sagged under the weight of ponderous tomes, she sat day by day listlessly turning over the leaves of her account books. She wore a mob cap, a short, red-and-white striped, woollen skirt, a white neckerchief folded across her breast, and a low-cut, light-coloured bodice with short sleeves gathered into a pucker just below the shoulder, leaving her round arms bare. Her only ornament was a plain gold cross, suspended by a bright ribbon round her throat, which gleamed above the tucker of her well-

furnished corset. Her attitude (and well she knew it !) threw into relief her lithe figure with its fine sensuous lines. She was admirably proportioned. Neither too short nor too tall, which is rare among women, who, for the most part, seem either to have just failed to reach, or to have inadvertently exceeded, the exact stature that Nature meant them to attain. Saucy, impetuous, with the free-and-easy manners of a hoyden, her beauty was dainty rather than distinguished ; a fresh colour, a provocative nose, with slightly dilated nostrils ; strange humid, alluring eyes ; beautiful teeth ; a full red mouth, which seemed to give a subtle and wonderful meaning to the lightest word she uttered ; and glorious auburn hair, gleaming like burnished gold as it caught and held the sunlight. The smooth, arched brow, the kindling eyes, the small nose with its slightly dilated nostrils, the moist lips curved like Cupid's bow—her every feature, in short—announced a hasty, passionate and rather voluptuous nature.

Without being well educated, the alert Anne Gabrielle, having been from her earliest childhood surrounded by books, had acquired a knowledge which was both wide and peculiar. On the worm-eaten shelves of her father's shop the heady flowers of eighteenth-century romance bloomed luxuriantly, and none denying her, she had plucked and freely eaten of the fruit. With Richardson she had shed tears over the woes of Clarissa Harlowe ; she had been disturbed by the subversive precepts expounded in the voluminous and exquisitely illustrated writings of that strange moralist Restif de

la Bretonne ; and had breathlessly followed the transmigrations of the soul of Amanzéi, as set forth in the subtly indecorous pages of *Le Sopha*. The spirit of libertinism and negation concentrated in these books, and others like them, exhaled an odour of intoxication and perversity like the perfume of tuberoses in a hothouse. It may be that this stifling atmosphere had rather heated the imagination and prematurely troubled the senses of this precocious girl. At any rate, the fair Babuti lived without care either for the present or the future, was free in her actions and still more free in her talk, and was, for the rest, a gay, active young woman, able, resolute, and of an extreme vivacity.

Any morning of the week she might have been observed seated in her accustomed place at the counter, arranging in stacks the new issues of the *Mercure de France*, the *Almanach des Dames*, and a consignment of those satirical and facetious pamphlets, both in prose and in verse, which poured from the presses of Amsterdam, Paris and London, and flooded the markets of Europe. From time to time, she would look up and listen (a characteristic attitude which Greuze afterwards immortalised in *The Listening Girl*) ; then continue her work, whilst the incessant tapping of one well turned foot in its red morocco, high-heeled shoe, betrayed the nervous impatience of an active body and a restless mind. She was soon bored when no customers visited the shop.

Suddenly she would stand up, as, coming from the direction of the Rue Dauphine, she caught the sound



of a whistled air from Philidor's latest opera, and a moment later, a tall, loosely knit figure, with a "lively, eager and extravagant bearing," would stride into the shop. The new-comer had "a high forehead, very bright eyes, rather large features, on which was stamped a good-nature closely bordering on the simplicity, the rusticity, of the olden times ; the face was at once serene, melancholy, dreamy, tender, violent, passionate, enthusiastic"—to use his own words about himself at this time. The prolixity is characteristic and must be excused, for the good fellow was so very interested in himself, and indeed, in everybody else, and most things in Heaven above and the Earth beneath. For the rest, he wore "a grey plush frock coat, with torn ruffs, and black worsted stockings, darned behind with white thread." Such was Diderot (for it was he) in those gay, careless days when he lived the life of an obscure hack-writer in Paris ; a life of shifts and expedients, of hard study and perpetual composition—devouring every printed thing that came his way, accepting work of all kinds from any hand—teaching mathematics, for instance, and learning them as he went along—a hard, penurious, hand-to-mouth existence, diversified by an occasional squalid adventure—which he could never learn to keep to himself—with an eighteenth-century equivalent of Mimi Pinson.

It was good to see him crossing the Pont Neuf, leaning from time to time over the parapet, to become absorbed in the many coloured life of the great river, sniffing with delight the fresh morning air with his long and sensitive

nose, or lingering to exchange full-flavoured jests with Margot, the baked-apple woman; with Manon, who sold kerchiefs; and with Isabeau, who sold kisses. This would be on his way to the Palais Royal Gardens, where he loved to sit in D'Argenson's seat, and talk to himself about politics, taste, philosophy and love. At such times, he says, he allowed his mind to play the libertine unchecked —to run after the first idea that offered, sage or gay, just as you see young-men-about-town following the steps of a joyous lady with her saucy bearing, her face all smiles, her eyes all fire, her tip-tilted nose; then quitting her for another—attacking all, but attaching themselves to none. Ah! his thoughts were the wantons for him!

If it were too cold or too wet to sit outside, he would take refuge in the Café de la Régence, where he would sometimes meet Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who had recently come to Paris with the extravagant theory which he fondly imagined would revolutionise the system of musical notation. This was in the heyday of the friendship which for some years bound the two philosophers.

Diderot would often amuse himself by watching the Homeric combats of Legalle and Philidor (scarcely less famous, then, as a musician than as a chess-player, but now remembered only as the latter) in this their favourite haunt. There was always good sport when Philidor was at the tables, for it was he who once played at the same time three different games, without seeing the chess-boards, against the three best players in London, and won two games and drew the other. At these matches the conversation was apt to be "very free," as

the secondhand booksellers would say, nor was Diderot's presence calculated to make it less so, for he had a natural aptitude in the style which has seldom been equalled and never surpassed.

It was in this resort that he met the odd creature whom he has immortalised as Rameau's Nephew. "He is a strange mixture of elevation and baseness," says Diderot, "of good sense and madness; the notions of good and bad must be strangely mixed up in his head, for he shows the good qualities which Nature has bestowed upon him, without ostentation, and the bad ones without shame. For the rest, he is endowed with a strong frame, a singular warmth of imagination and an uncommon vigour of lungs. If you ever meet him and you are not arrested by his originality, you will either stuff your fingers in your ears, or take to your heels. Lord! what a pair of lungs! Sometimes he is as thin and pale as a man in the last stages of consumption; you could count his teeth through his cheeks: at other times, he is plump and sleek as a financier. To-day in dirty linen, his breeches torn and patched, with scarcely a shoe to his foot, he sneaks along with bent head. To-morrow all powdered, curled and in a fine coat, he marches along with head erect and such assurance that you would almost take him for an honest man. He lives from day to day, sad or gay according to circumstances. His first care in the morning, when he gets up, is to know where he will dine; and after dinner he begins to think where he will sup. Night, too, brings its uneasiness. Either he climbs to the little garret that he has—unless,

indeed, the landlady, tired of waiting for her rent, has taken back his key—or else he slinks to some tavern on the outskirts of the town, where he waits for daybreak over a piece of bread and a mug of beer. When he has not threepence in his pocket, as sometimes happens, he has recourse either to a hackney carriage belonging to a friend, or to the coachman of some man of quality, who gives him a bed on the straw beside the horses. In the morning he has still part of his mattress in his hair. If the weather is mild he measures the courts or the Champs Élysées all night long. He reappears, with the day, in town, dressed overnight for the morrow, and from the morrow sometimes for the rest of the week." *

But, above all, Diderot felt himself at home in the poky shop of goodman Babuti, preferably, be it understood, when the goodman was absent; and almost daily he came to chat with this girl, " pink as a rose, dainty, white and straight as a lily," † with the smile in her ingenuous eyes which he found so very agreeable. Dangling his legs from the high stool by the counter, he would sit by the hour together, and talk and talk and talk, whilst the vivid figure of Anne Gabrielle flitted from shelf to shelf, mounted the steps and stood on tiptoe in order to reach the great dusty folios, and bantered the Philosopher when he interrupted his discourse in order to express his admiration for the neatness of her ankles. Fortunately for him, he was not a romantic, and he escaped the toils of matrimony which she undoubtedly

* *See* Diderot (D.) *Le Neveu de Rameau.*

† *See* Diderot (D.) *Salons.* Portraits de Mme. Greuze.

set for him. And, yet, was he so much better off with the pious shrew with whom at thirty he contracted a love match, which he spent a considerable part of the remainder of his life in regretting? Anne Gabrielle was, at any rate, one of those girls who could give the full-flavoured and joyous promises of the Marriage Service with her whole heart, having long ago persuaded herself that it would be through no fault of her own if she did not keep them. There would, at least, have been compensations; and it might have been a good thing for Diderot, for Greuze and for Anne Gabrielle herself, if the flirtation had ended in matrimony.

You should have seen the future Encyclopædist come bursting like a tornado into the shop!

"Mademoiselle," he would say, after kissing her fingers, "will you kindly give me the *Tales of Lafontaine*, or a *Petronius*?"

"Here they are, Monsieur," she would answer; "are there any other books you require?"

"Excuse me, Mademoiselle, but—er——"

"Yes, Monsieur, go on!"

"Do you happen to have *La Réligieuse en chemise*?"

"Fie, for shame, Monsieur! How can any one read such improper books!"

"Ah, Mademoiselle! It's an improper book, is it? I didn't know!" And whilst the shamefaced Anne Gabrielle sought to hide her blushes, the daring, headlong fellow would run out of the shop shaking with laughter.*

* *See* Diderot (D.) *Salons*. Greuze.

## CHAPTER V

### OF THE FAIR BOOKSELLER, THE PHILOSOPHER, AND THE PARASITE

"I MYSELF loved her well," wrote Diderot, many years later, "when I was young and she was known as Mademoiselle Babuti"; but his passion for the pretty bookseller of the Quai des Augustins was not of a violent character, such as that he felt for other women before and since meeting her, for when her time came to marry he seems to have given her up without a pang. Entering the shop one day by chance, he had found that customers were well received, and that the handsome girl in attendance was obliging and endeavoured to give the impression that her father's was the best stocked and most inviting bookseller's shop on the south side of the river. The Philosopher was entirely of that opinion. Indeed, are we not all pleased, when we go to buy anything, to be served gaily and promptly and to see our money taken as though it were accepted more as a souvenir of ourselves than as the price of our purchase? And so much good grace and courtesy did Anne Gabrielle bring to her calling that it was just this impression she succeeded in giving. So, the Sieur Diderot came very frequently to the shop of goodman Babuti.



Apart from this, as a man of letters, he had not failed to remark that this particular shop always contained a fine assortment of rare books and manuscripts, which it delighted his heart to handle and peruse as the spirit moved him. The bookseller showed himself grateful for the compliments paid him on the excellence of his books, nor did his daughter disdain those addressed to her on the charms of her person. Babuti himself, although he could not fail sometimes to overhear them, was not easily offended at the hardy proposals made to his daughter, so long, at least, as he got something out of it. He was an easy-going old fellow—as you may see by his fine portrait by Greuze—shrewd, quietly humorous, and very much occupied with his business. Whilst he rummaged about at the back of the shop, his customers paid brazen-faced court to Anne Gabrielle. There was he, innocently dusting, classifying, cataloguing, and pricing his books, whilst, at the counter, Mademoiselle responded in kind to compliments which did not commonly err on the side of prudery. Yes, goodman Babuti's little shop was a very agreeable place in which to while away an hour or two; there could be no doubt about that.*

Nor were these the only attractions for the Philosopher. Sometimes his cronies sought him out there to argue and cap paradoxes with him. Now, he dearly loved a paradox, and was himself a match for the best in that style. So he was pleased one day, when he was seated on the high stool by the counter, to be accosted

* *See* Diderot (D.) *Salons*: *Notices sur les Tableaux de Greuze.*

by that queer creature, Rameau's Nephew, who said that his thoughts had lately been much preoccupied with the question of his son's education.

"Do you love your son?" asked Diderot.

"Do I love the little savage! Why, I simply dote on him! He is already greedy, cunning, idle, smutty-minded, a liar and a cheat, in fact, a regular chip of the old block."

"I suppose you will make a musician of him, so that the likeness may be exact."

"A musician!" exclaimed Rameau. "Sometimes I look at him and grind my teeth, saying: 'If thou shouldst ever know a note of music, I believe I would wring thy neck for thee!'"

"Why so?"

"Music leads to nothing."

"It leads to everything."

"Yes, when one excels in it. But who can promise himself that his child will excel? The odds are ten thousand to one that he will ever be more than a wretched scraper of catgut, like his father before him. Do you know that it would perhaps be easier to find a child fit to govern a great realm, fit to be a great king, than one fit for a great violin player?"

"It seems to me," said Diderot, "that agreeable talents, even if they are only middling, among a people without morals, lost in debauchery and luxury, get a man rapidly on the road to fortune."

"No doubt," agreed the Nephew, "gold, and gold again; gold is everything, and all the rest without gold is

nothing. . . . At any rate I shall not be such an idiot as most fathers, who give the education of Lacedæmon to a child destined to live in Paris. Why, they could not do worse even if they deliberately planned the misery of their children. If the education I am going to give my boy is bad, the morals of my country are to blame, not I. I want him to be happy, or what amounts to the same thing, honoured, rich and powerful. I know something about the easiest ways to that end, and I mean to teach him them in good time. If you sages blame me, the multitude and success will acquit me. He shall have money, I can tell you. If he has plenty of it he will lack nothing, not even your esteem and respect."

"You may be mistaken."

"Then he will do without it, as many others do."

"To be quite frank with you, I like you better as a musician than as a moralist."

"Yet," replied Rameau, "I am only second-rate in music, and really superior in morals."

"I doubt that; but even if it were so, I am an honest man, and your principles are not mine."

"So much the worse for you! Ah, if only I had your talents!"

"Never mind my talents," hastily interposed Diderot; "let us get back to yours."

"If only I could express myself like you! But I have an infernally ridiculous jargon, half literary and fashionable and half slang of the markets."

"Nonsense! I am a bad talker; I only know how

to speak the truth, and that does not always pay, as you know."

"But it is not for telling the truth; on the contrary, it is for lying artistically that I covet your gifts; if I knew how to write, to put together a book, to turn a dedicatory epistle, to intoxicate a fool as to his own merits, to insinuate myself into the good graces of women!"

"You know all that a thousand times better than I do; why, I should not be worthy to be even your pupil!"

"How many great qualities lost!" sighed Rameau, "of which you do not know the price!"

"I get the price that I ask."

"If that were true you would not be wearing that shabby coat, that cheap worsted vest, those coarse woollen stockings, those clumsy shoes and that ancient wig."

"Agreed; one must be a sorry bungler not to be rich, if one sticks at nothing to become so. But there are people like me who do not regard wealth as the most precious thing in the world; queer people, you know!"

"Very queer," assented the Nephew; "one is not born with that sort of twist; one takes the trouble to give it to oneself, for it is not natural."

"Natural to man?"

"No; for everything that lives, without exception, seeks its well-being at the expense of those who have it; and I am sure that if I let my little savage grow up without telling him anything, he would wish to be

richly dressed, sumptuously fed, cherished by men, loved by women, and gather to himself all the pleasures of life."

"But," objected Diderot, "if your little savage were left to himself, let him preserve all his silliness, and add to the reason of the child in the cradle the violence of the man of thirty, he would strangle his father and dishonour his mother."

"That proves the necessity of a good education. Who denies it? And what is a good education but that which leads to all sorts of pleasures without danger and without inconvenience?"

"I am perhaps not so far from your opinion, but let us keep clear of explanations."

"Why?"

"Because I fear that we only agree in appearance and that if we once embarked on a discussion as to what are the dangers and inconveniences to be avoided, we should no longer understand each other."

Rameau shrugged his shoulders and made no reply.

"All I know," he said at last, "is that if the proverb which says, 'the money of fools is the patrimony of people of wits,' had not existed, I should have made it myself. I felt that Nature had put my lawful inheritance into the purses of the foolish rich; and I invented a thousand means of getting back my own."

"Yes, I know all about your thousand means; you have told me about them, and I have admired them immensely. But with so many resources, why not have tried that of a fine work?"

"When I am alone, I take up my pen intending to write. I bite my nails and press my brow; your humble servant, good night, the Muse is not at home! I had convinced myself that I had genius; but at the end of my first line I read that I am a fool, a fool, a triple fool! And how is one to feel, to think, to rise to the heights, to paint in strong colours, whilst consorting with such creatures as those whom one must see in order to live; in the midst of such chatter as: 'How charming the boulevard was to-day!' 'Have you heard the little Marmotte? Her playing is ravishing.' 'The beautiful Madame —— is beginning to fade; fancy wearing a head-dress like that at 45!' 'Mademoiselle —— is covered with diamonds, and she gets them cheap.'

"'You mean, she gets them dear.'

"'No, I don't.'

"'Where did you see her?'

"'At the play.'

"'Mademoiselle Lemierre was to have taken the part of the Vestal in the new opera, but she is for the second time in an interesting condition; they don't know who will take her place.'

"'Mademoiselle Arnould has just left her little Comte; they say she is negotiating with Bertin.'

"'Mademoiselle de Miré, of the Opera, has just buried her lover, and the wags propose to engrave in musical notation upon his tomb:

La Mi Ré La Mi Là.'

"How can you expect that listening to, and passing on,

GIRL'S HEAD

(National Gallery, London)

*Photo by Messrs. W. A. Mansell & Co., London*

GIRL'S HEAD

(National Gallery, London)

Photo by Messrs. W. A. Mansell & Co., London



these sort of things every day of the week will exalt the soul and lead to great things ? "

"No" ; replied Diderot ; "it would be better to lock yourself up in your garret, drink water, eat dry bread, and work hard."

" Perhaps so," agreed the Nephew, " but if only you knew how lazy I am ! Besides, why sacrifice oneself for such a very problematical success ? And then what about my name ? Rameau ! It is not with talents as with nobility, which transmits itself and increases in lustre by passing from grandfather to father, from father to son, and from son to grandson, without the ancestor impressing a spark of his merit on his descendant. . . . It is not so with talents. Even to attain the renown of your father, you have to be far cleverer than he was ; and you must have inherited his fibre. It was just that which failed me ; but the wrist is nimble, the bow scrapes, the pot boils, and if that is not glory, it is at least broth ! "

" Still, if I were you I would try."

" Do you think I haven't tried ? " No, Mr. Philosopher, you are too much up in the clouds. That is your affair. I am on the earth, and I mean to stay there. . . . Besides, I don't think affairs are managed properly if I haven't always something to eat ! A precious fine economy, where there are men stuffed full of everything, while others, who have a stomach just as importunate as they have, and a hunger that recurs as regularly as theirs, haven't as much as a mouthful ! And that's not the worst of it. Want forces us poor devils into such

constrained postures. The needy man doesn't walk like any one else : he jumps, he crawls, he wriggles, he limps ; his whole life is passed in posturing ! "

As he spoke, the Nephew began to smile, to imitate the admirer, the fawning suppliant, the toadeater ; with his right foot forward and his left thrown back, with curved spine and head lifted up, with open mouth and his eyes seemingly fixed upon those of his patron, his arms stretched out towards some objects, he awaits his order, receives it, dashes off, returns ; the order is executed ; he reports what he has done ; he is attentive to everything ; he picks up something that has fallen, he places a pillow or a footstool in position ; he holds a saucer, brings a chair, opens a door, closes the window, draws the curtains, watches his master or mistress ; he stands immovable, his arms hanging down, his legs straight, he listens attentively, seeks to read their faces. Then he added :

" That is my pantomime, pretty much the same sort of thing as that of all flatterers, courtiers, valets and beggars."

At these antics, Anne Gabrielle broke into silvery laughter, and Diderot, while he laughed, was impressed, as he never failed to be, by the truth which was always to be found behind this strange fellow's buffooneries.

" But according to your account," said Diderot, after a pause, " there are plenty of beggars in the world, and I don't know anybody who is not acquainted with some of the steps of your dance."

" You are right," answered the Nephew, " there is

only one man in the whole kingdom who walks, and that is the Sovereign."

"The Sovereign!" exclaimed the Philosopher, "don't you think a dainty foot, a white throat, a bewitching nose, make even him from time to time go through his pantomime? Whoever has need of another is really indigent and assumes a posture. The King postures before his mistress, and before God he treads his pantomimic measure. The Minister dances the step of the courtier, flatterer, valet, and beggar before his King. The crowd of the ambitious cut a hundred vile capers before the Minister. . . . Faith, what you call the pantomime of beggars is only the grand hubbub of the earth."

"That is my only consolation!"

"The things of this life have no doubt a certain price; but you ignore the sacrifices you make to get them. You dance, you have danced, and you will continue to dance the vile pantomime."

"True," assented the Nephew, "but, then, it has given me no trouble in the past, and it will give me no more trouble in the future; therefore, I should be a fool to adopt another posture which would be difficult to acquire and impossible to keep up. But from what you tell me, I see that my poor little wife was a philosopher in her way. She was as brave as a lion; sometimes, when there was no bread, and we hadn't a sou in the house and had sold nearly all our clothes, I would throw myself on our bed and rack my brains trying to think of somebody who would lend me a crown which I

needn't pay back, whilst she, seated at her harpsichord, would be singing like a nightingale, as gay as you please. You ought to have heard her! When I was playing at a concert, I used to take her with me, and on the way, I would say to her 'Come along, Madame, make yourself admired, don't be afraid to show your talents or your charms.' But, alas, I lost her, poor little woman! Besides her talents, she had a mouth hardly large enough to hold your little finger; teeth like a string of pearls; eyes, feet, skin, cheeks, lips, hands and arms worth modelling. Why, sooner or later, she would have had a Surveyor of the Taxes, at the very least. She had a carriage, a figure, hips!—Lord, what hips she had, to be sure! She was just like Mademoiselle, when she brought you that volume in which the learned Erasmus discourses upon the wiles of women.

Here he began to imitate the bearing of his wife. He walked about the shop with mincing steps and a swinging movement of the hips, whilst his hand manipulated an imaginary fan, for all the world like the girls of the Palais Royal. Anne Gabrielle laughed till she cried, and the Nephew continued his discourse.

"I took her everywhere, to the Tuileries, the Palais Royal, the Boulevards. When she crossed the road in the forenoon, bareheaded, in a short morning gown, you would have turned round to look at her, you couldn't have helped yourself; you could have encircled her waist between four fingers. Those who followed her, listened to the patter of her little feet, feasted their eyes on the round lines of her form, and hurried after her.

She let them come up with her, then suddenly turned on them her great, shining black eyes, which brought them up short. But, alas! I lost her, and all my hopes of fortune with her!"

Then he would burst into tears, wring his hands, and howl at the top of his voice.

And Diderot, with an eye on Anne Gabrielle, would say:

"Yes, my poor fellow, that's just it, you never know where you are with a coquette. Say what you will, a chaste bearing, simple and modest manners, united in a graceful person, are a woman's most seductive charms."

Thereupon, the Nephew would spring to his feet, wipe his eyes on his tattered sleeve, and running up to Anne Gabrielle, put his hands on her shoulders, and look into her eyes. She scarcely knew whether to laugh or to be annoyed with him. Suddenly, releasing her, he would turn sharply on Diderot, with the words:

"It's easy for you to talk, Mr. Philosopher: you haven't lost your wife! Bah! women are all alike. Good King Francis knew very well what he was talking about when he said 'Souvent femme varie, bien fol qui s'y fie.' They are all tricksters, I tell you, and the prettier they are the more reason to beware of their treachery!"

"Steady on, Nephew!" protested Diderot. "You will offend Mademoiselle. Don't make her regret that she is beautiful."

"I fear you are an idle flatterer, Mr. Philosopher," said Anne Gabrielle, blushing and smiling with pleasure.

"Of course, he is," bawled Rameau, "we all are when we want anything. The sooner you both get those romantic ideas out of your heads the better. Why, I who speak had a little wife, dainty and appetising as Mademoiselle——"

"Yes, yes, my good fellow," hastily interposed Diderot, "we know all about your wife."

"I lost her, poor little woman!" he sobbed. "But when a man's in love with a girl, whether he marries her or not, he will regret it. There is always that consolation!"

"Come along, Nephew," said Diderot, taking his arm, "that is enough paradoxes for one sitting; you make Mademoiselle's head ring." And with a sly look at Anne Gabrielle, he carried the weeping Rameau off to drown his sorrows at a certain cosy tavern he knew of in the Rue Saint-André des Arts.*

When they were gone, Anne Gabrielle brought the steps from behind the counter, mounted them with nimble feet, and replaced among the duodecimos upon the top shelf, the volume in which the wily and learned Erasmus, with much Attic salt and very worldly wisdom, discourses upon the guile, the frailty, and the perversity of women.

Now, it so happened that Monsieur Greuze, fresh from his triumph at the Salon, in one of the walks he was in the habit of taking each day to get together material for his pictures and to work out his ideas, had that morning wandered over the Pont Neuf, and was idly reading the

* *See* Diderot (D.) *Le Neveu de Rameau.*

titles of the books in Babuti's shop window, when he caught sight of the fair bookseller's neat figure balanced on the top of the steps. His eye rapidly took in her form, and he thrilled with delight. Hers was the face that had visited him in his dreams. After a moment's hesitation, he entered the shop "to purchase some books and in order to examine her more at leisuse." * Anne Gabrielle gathered her skirts about her feet, gracefully jumped off the steps, and stood smiling into the eyes of an exceedingly good-looking and fascinated young artist.

And that is how Monsieur Greuze took a walk and met his fate, and Anne Gabrielle Babuti stayed at home and found her painter.

* Greuze (J. B.) *Mémoire. Archives de l'Art Français.*

## CHAPTER VI

### HOW MONSIEUR GREUZE TURNED HIS BACK UPON THE FAIR BOOKSELLER AND JOURNEYED TO ITALY, AND OF WHAT HE FOUND THERE

From the day when Monsieur Greuze, led by the hand of happy chance—for, whatever came of it, we have not the heart to regret the circumstance which brought together such a painter and his ideal of feminine beauty—from the day, I say, when the rising artist entered Babuti's shop to admire Anne Gabrielle's pretty ankles as she stood on tiptoe to replace the volume of the learned Desiderius Erasmus upon the top shelf, and had been reduced to speechlessness at the sight of her whole person, he was haunted by this girl's face, which his brush was destined to immortalise. It would float before his eyes at the most inopportune moments. When he stood before his picture in the Salon, telling how he came to paint it, and explaining its story, as he loved to do, to Monsieur Denis Diderot, the philosopher, Monsieur Jean Georges Wille, the German engraver, and a select band of admirers, he would suddenly find himself looking into those wonderful eyes of hers. Even when he sat at his easel, absorbed in his painting, her image would mysteriously interpose itself between him and his model, and he would catch himself dreaming of the poise

of her head and the curve of her gleaming throat as she stood on the threshold, waving her hand and calling after him to come again soon, as he threaded his way, among the street vendors and their wares, across the Pont Neuf. Do what he would, he could not get rid of the radiant vision. He told himself that, although she was certainly beautiful, yet her "face was wanting in expression, and that she had even a rather sheepish look." * All was in vain. The face became a perfect obsession. It irritated and annoyed him, and he rated himself for a double, triple fool, for allowing a girl's face, which he had seen only once, to interfere in this way with his work.

Nor was it that he was in love; had that been the case, he could have understood it. He had stopped to admire her, as he was in the habit of stopping to admire every beautiful woman; that was all. He knew that it would not have broken his heart if he had never seen her again; but he also knew that, whatever Fate had in store for them, this one glimpse of her face would have a profound influence upon him; although it was to be long before he fully realised that this was the one woman whose beauty alone was capable of inspiring the kind of work which peculiarly suited his genius. At present he felt only annoyance that the philosophy which he had so painfully built up had proved to be such a broken reed. For, after his first romantic attachment to the beautiful Madame Grandon, he had been careful to keep women at arm's length, and it was largely his refusal to join in the fun of the studios that had made

* *Archives de l'Art Français.*

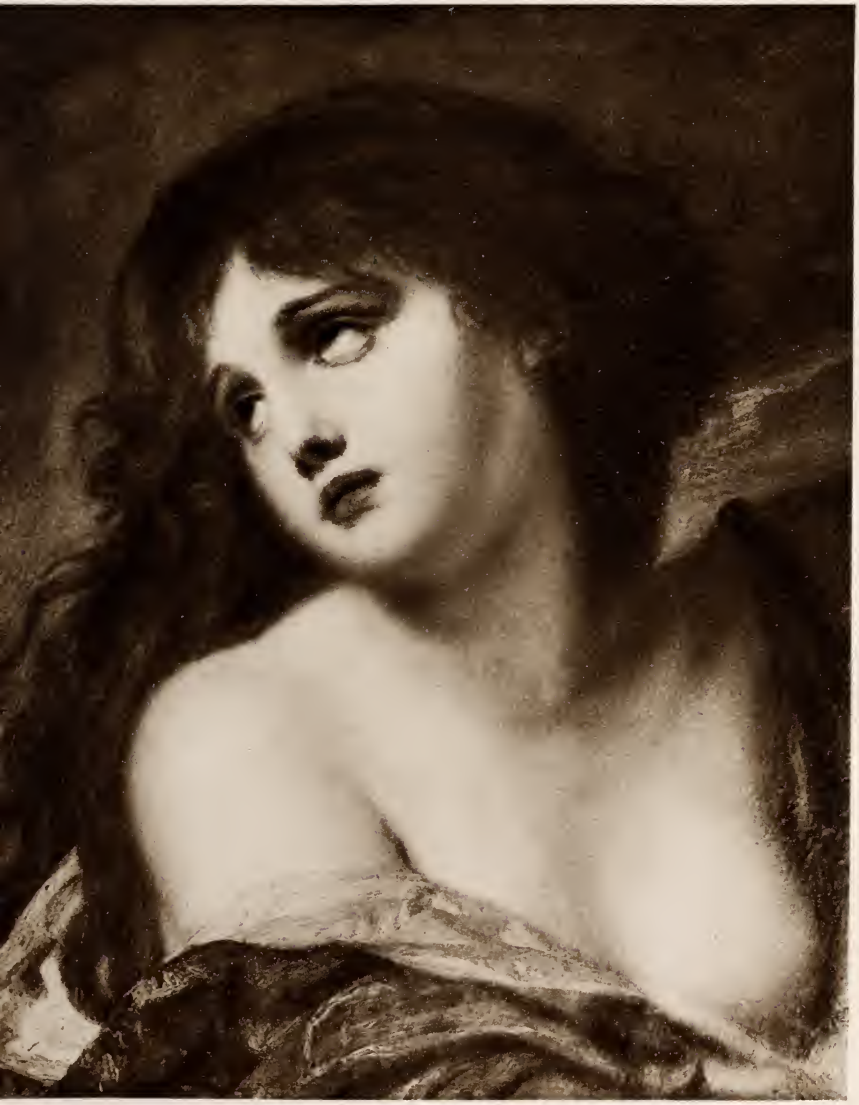
him so unpopular in the class rooms of the Academy. It was not that he was impervious to the charms of women; on the contrary, we have seen that he was a sentimentalist to the marrow of his bones. But his was a strong, deep nature, and he had determined to become a famous painter; there would be plenty of time for love afterwards. And in those years of bitter struggle, he had come to hold strong views as to the disastrous effects of feminine entanglements on the young artist who has yet to make a name.

Art is an exacting mistress and demands the undivided attention of her devotees, and the young artist who neglects her for another is lost. Greuze had seen too many promising men among his contemporaries ruined by their infatuation for a pretty face and a rounded form, to be guilty of that particular kind of folly. During that stern, uphill fight, he knew that all women were dangerous; those who were foolish, and those who were not; those who loved with all their hearts, and those who allowed themselves to be loved, without their hearts entering into the matter; both good women and bad women, and of the two kinds, the latter were not the worst; for, with the best intentions in the world, the good women smothered the artist under their affectionate and ill-advised pamperings; he became soft under their hands, just when it was essential for him to be as hard as iron, in order to wring out the secrets of Nature and to solve the eternal riddles of Art. Good women make life too easy for a man; and no young artist was ever the worse for a hard apprenticeship. At the critical

ARIADNE

(Wallace Collection, London)

*Photo by Messrs. W. A. Mansell & Co., London*



time of his development he must be absolutely alone; none can help him, but all can hinder. Just as Jacob of old sent Rachel, and Leah, and Bilhah, Rachel's handmaiden, with all that he had, across the brook before wrestling with the Angel, so every original artist must shut all women out of his life, in order to enter on this first grim struggle which must be fought out in utter solitude. Greuze, the country lad who had come to Paris to win fame, had learned that lesson, and he had hitherto lived for Art alone. "By his self-control," says Goethe, "we know the master."

Greuze was still very much preoccupied with the fascinations of Anne Gabrielle, when Louis Gougenot, Abbé de Chézal-Benoît, a wealthy and learned art lover and archæologist of repute, wishing to undertake a journey to Italy in order to study the antique and the fine arts, invited Jean-Baptiste to accompany him. This was the classical tour deemed absolutely necessary for the proper development of every artistic talent—a sort of honeymoon which every young artist of promise took on wedding the Muse. And Greuze, although he was not fond of patronage, accepted, as Watteau, Nattier, Boucher and others had done before him. Yet we may be sure that he had no intention to spend his time in making servile copies of the old masters, he had far too original a talent for that. Had Boucher been his master, there would have been no need for that painter to tell him, as he did Fragonard, "If you take those fellows seriously it will be all up with you!" Neither of these young

artists needed that particular warning. As M. Camille Mauclair has well said: "When a man begins his career by painting *The Father of a Family explaining the Bible* there is no real danger of his taking 'those fellows seriously.'" He meant to go his own way. The Abbé was generous, and made it clear that he would defray not only the expenses of the journey, but also all the fees for the tuition of his *protégé*.

The Marquis de Marigny, the brother of Madame de Pompadour, and *Directeur Ordonnataire des Beaux Arts*—"Poisson Mécène," as Diderot pleasantly called him—a man who deserves every honour for his immense services to French Art, having sanctioned Greuze's departure, the pair set out on their journey in the late autumn of 1755. This permit, which has been preserved, runs thus:

"Leave granted to the Sieur Greuze to travel in Italy.

*24th September*, 1755.

"We, Marquis de Marigny, etc. etc. . . . Permit the Sieur Greuze, King's Painter and member of his Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, to travel in Italy to acquire new knowledge and to perfect himself still more in the art of painting, by studying the works of the great masters which it will be within his power to see.

"In witness of which, our hand

"MARIGNY."

Travelling by way of Toulouse, Carcassonne, Béziers,

Lunel, Tarascon, and Aix, they took ship at Marseilles for Civita Vecchia, and reached Rome without mishap.

The first of his countrymen whom Greuze met in Rome was "the amiable Fragonard," sometime pupil of Chardin who could make nothing of him, and then of Boucher, who had also rejected him once and taken him back again, to find that he was the best pupil he had ever taught. Three years before, at the age of twenty, and without academic training of any sort, "Frago," as he was familiarly called, had won the Prix de Rome with his picture *Jeroboam Sacrificing to Idols*, but the Royal Treasury was at such a low ebb, that he had been compelled to defer his departure, and had reached Rome only a month or two before Greuze's arrival. The two young men had known each other slightly in Paris, but now they became fast friends, and whenever the opportunity occurred they wandered off together into the Campagna, and amused themselves making sketches of the life and manners of the people rather than sit all day long in the galleries, as they were supposed to do, copying the old masters. During these rambles, Greuze gathered together sufficient material to illustrate a folio volume on Italian costume; whilst Fragonard filled his portfolio with those delightful impressionistic studies of Italian life and scenery which alone would have been sufficient to immortalise his name.

The Sunday following his arrival in the Eternal City, Greuze called on the French Ambassador, Monsieur de Stainville, and dined with the painters, sculptors,

architects and musicians, gathered from the four corners of the earth, who assembled on that day at the Ambassador's hospitable board. Then he paid his official visit to Natoire, who had been Director of the French Academy at Rome since 1751. But on the whole, he mixed little with his compatriots, even with those influential ones who could have helped him, for he felt that when an artist knows a great many people to whom he has to pay court, he stands in danger of weakening his individuality, of losing his point of view, of doing what others do in order to please them. He felt that if the great artists had done that their works would never have inspired those who came after them.

Rome was at that time the world's great musical centre. The nobles, an ignorant lot on the whole, raved about every new composer as he appeared, whilst the Princes of the Church haggled with singers over their price, and collected and kept the masters of song as assiduously as their fathers had collected the relics of classical art. Music was cultivated by all classes; and Greuze loved to mix among the gaily-clad people, to listen to the improvised concerts at the street corners, or wander into a theatre to hear the famous composers Porpora, Galuppi, Durante, or Jommelli conducting at the harpsichord, whilst equally famous singers and actors performed their compositions. He often visited the Teatro Aliberti, the principal Roman playhouse of the eighteenth century, for which Metastasio wrote his plays, where, it is said, the great Pacchierotti, when playing Arbaces one evening and not hearing the usual

instrumental bars which filled up his recitative, turned angrily to the orchestra, exclaiming, " What the devil are you about ? " and received the simple answer from the composer, " We are weeping ! "

Greuze was attracted to the theatres not only by the music and the fine acting, but by those witty and amusing audiences, which Vernon Lee has so cleverly described in her *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy.*

" The middle classes," says Miss Paget in her luminous pages, " an easy-going, independent, rather indolent set, with the intelligence, cynicism, and good humour of Pasquino, were so many born critics ; the opinion of shopkeepers and shopkeepers' wives, who heard music from morning till night, was important ; that of doctors, lawyers, and secular priests paramount. The enormous class of indescribable half-lay, half-ecclesiastical creatures, poor, witty, disreputable, called *abati* ; adventurers, scholars, poetasters, filled the pits of the theatres, where they reigned supreme ; they in their rusty black cloaks and horsehair wigs, bearding the scarlet robed cardinals and be-ribboned grandees in the boxes. For they were a most intelligent and pugnacious lot ; quick at epigram and pasquinade, always ready with smart sayings, sonnets, and unripe apples, wherewith to express their several states of mind. Behind these youngsters were the graver wearers of black : physicians, jurists, chaplains, and secretaries, respectable old gentlemen who had published unread treatises on the music of the ancients, on the opera, etc. ; slow and reserved in judgment, inquisitorial and paternal. These two classes

supplied the total absence of musical journalism; their disputes at coffee houses, their disquisitions in drawing-rooms, constituted the æsthetical life of the people; their combined impertinence and dignity, rapidity of perception and solidity of judgment, kept all in check; cardinals and nobles could not gainsay them; when they had cried *evviva* to a singer, the proudest princess could not shut her door to him, although he be a lout and a coxcomb. When they had thrown tomatoes at a composer, the Pope himself could not engage him.

"This critical tendency, due to constitution and social arrangements, was considerably increased by an absurd regulation forbidding women to perform on any stage in the Eternal City . . . a regulation made early in the seventeenth century, which the priests of the eighteenth century were too unoriginal, rather than too moral, to revoke. Consequently, all the female parts were performed by men or boys, to the great delight of Goethe, to whom the performance of a black-bearded young man, as Goldoni's Mirandolina, seemed a return to the days of Roscius. At the opera, the women's parts were performed by boys, who looked the parts amazingly well, as Burney, de Brosses, Goethe, and Miss Berry inform us. . . . Now, not only did the exclusion of women, who were often handsome and invariably coquettish, render public appreciation purely artistic and coolly critical, but the youth and comparative immaturity of these boys rendered their critics singularly sharp-witted and practical; these lads were brought rather to finish their musical education than to be applauded; their

masters came less to make money by them than to sound public opinion; and the audience reproved, and approved, and corrected timid schoolboys in a manner which would never have been tolerated by men and women of confirmed style and settled reputation. The Roman public was, therefore, not only critical to an intense degree, but highly paternal, and with paternal freedom and vigour did it administer the intellectual rod to singers, composers, and teachers."

Such were the Roman audiences at the time of Greuze's sojourn in Italy. And so, with his country rambles with Frago, his visits to the theatres, and his constant sketching of street scenes, our artist's days passed not unpleasantly.

At the Academy classes his "sub-acid humour" and the brusqueness of his manners were not calculated to find favour in the eyes of his professors. There is an anecdote in illustration of the point. In the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, in a portfolio of drawings from the collection of M. de Livry, Évêque de Callinique—he of whom Wille, the engraver, has so much to say in his *Memoirs*—is preserved an academic nude study of a man's figure, drawn by Greuze at this time, with a note at the bottom of the sheet stating that Natoire, the Director of the Academy, having first praised the drawing, afterwards remarked to his pupil that the figure was lame. Whereupon, Greuze retorted:

"Monsieur, you would be happy if you could do one like it."

We can readily imagine the confusion and dismay of the poor, benevolent, timid old Academician as he hobbled off to examine the next student's work, amidst the tittering of the whole class-room.*

The fact is that as an artist, Greuze never felt himself at home in the Eternal City. The language spoken by the great masters he found too austere, and he understood it no better than did Fragonard. Before the antique, he felt as we may imagine a Chinaman might feel who had lost his way among the ruins of Athens. "The strength and energy of Michelangelo," said Fragonard—and he might have been speaking for Greuze too—"frightened me; before his work I experienced a strange feeling which I am quite at a loss to describe; on seeing the beauties of Raphael, I was moved to tears, and my pencil fell from my hands; for weeks together I remained in a state of indolence which I was quite unable to overcome, until I applied myself to the study of those painters whom I could hope some day to vie with: it was thus that Baroccio, Pietro da Cortona, Solimena, and Tiepolo drew my attention."

The great masters simply paralysed both young painters, and together they turned to the more accessible graces of the decadents, and lived with them, studied them, and absorbed them. A certain amount of drawing from the antique, of course, all the students had to do;

* Previous biographers of Greuze have implied that this incident happened in the Academy class-rooms in Paris, but since Natoire had taken up his appointment at Rome in 1751, and did not return to France until some years later, I have ventured to shift the scene of this anecdote to Rome.

but Greuze does not seem to have satisfied his masters much better than Frago had done, though matters did not go quite to the same length with him, for at one time Natoire was so dissatisfied with Fragonard's work, that he wrote to the authorities at home expressing a doubt as to whether that artist had really painted the picture which had won the Prix de Rome.

The Abbé Gougenot's notes on Greuze in his journal of the tour in Italy have a satirical touch which seems to indicate that the pair were not on so cordial a footing as they might have been; owing probably to Greuze's failure to respond to the classical ideal. The good Abbé does not mince his words:

"Greuze," he says, "was the most capricious of artists. In order to satisfy him, we had to get together at a moment's notice all the models necessary for the picture which he happened to be engaged upon. Then, when once they were assembled and set in their poses, he would declare that he did not feel in the vein for work, and would immediately send them about their business, notwithstanding the fact that they had to be paid as if they had posed throughout the day. This singular man frequently had fantasies of this kind."

Evidently the words of a man who was rather out of sympathy with the artist. Yet he was charmed, in spite of himself, by some of Greuze's Italian *genre* pictures such as the superb *Geste Napolitain*, and several costume studies, which he bought. It was at this time, also, that Greuze painted his benefactor's portrait, of which the Chevalier des Mousseaux says:

"This is one of the great artist's best portraits; it is in the manner of Vandyck. We have always regretted that Greuze afterwards altered his style of portrait painting"—a regret in which, I take it (fine as the portrait undoubtedly is), most of us will not be inclined to follow him. On January 10, 1756, the Academy forwarded to the Abbé in Italy, the gratifying notification that he had been elected an Honorary Associate of that Society, by way of thanking him for "undertaking to conduct into Italy, Monsieur Greuze, whose talents, now so well known, are increasing and have caused him to merit the title of *agréé*."

The Abbé left Italy in May of the same year, but Greuze stayed on. A passage in the *Voyage d'Italie*, written to send home by the Abbé Barthélemy, a member of the Academy and the famous author of the *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce*, who happened to be in Rome at this time, is not without interest in this connection:

"I am setting out to-morrow for Civita-Vecchia," he says, "with M. l'Ambassadeur et Mme l'Ambassadrice. M. de Coste and the Abbé Gougenot will go very shortly, and I shall thus spare myself the sight of their departure. Greuze is remaining at Rome. The Abbé Gougenot wished to bring him back, but he said that since the Academy had done him the honour of receiving him, he felt that he ought to recognise their kindness by making fresh efforts. . . . I like this resolution of his: it seems to me to show an uncommon zeal, courage, and spirit of emulation. If you approve of it I beg you to justify his decision to the Marquis

de Marigny and to all who are interested in the progress of this young man, who appears to have great talent.*

Our painter's relations with his fellow students were not much better than they had been when working in the Academy class-room in Paris. He went once or twice to a certain Roman café where a party of French artists were in the habit of assembling to discuss art and parade their eloquence. At these meetings all the masters were passed in review and handled without gloves. They criticised this one and tore that one to shreds. All who fell below the level of Raphael were treated as wretched bunglers who ought to have been house-painters; and even Raphael was blamed for not humbling himself sufficiently before the antique. The pleasant part of it all was that these magniloquent youngsters studied neither Raphael nor the antique, and the nearest that most of them ever got to the classical ideal was when they were pursuing some brown-skinned hussy through the streets of ancient Rome: this frequently happened, and at such times no fault could be found, in the matter of assiduity, with their pursuit of the Beautiful. These discussions generally ended in brawls over the charms of their respective models. So, on the whole, Greuze preferred to stay at home to talk nonsense with the lively Frago, or to make costume sketches for his pictures, *Les Œufs Cassés*, *La Paresseuse*, and *L'Accordeur de Guitare*, which he intended to have ready for the first exhibition at the Salon upon his return to France.

* *See* Barthélemy (L.) *Voyage d'Italie*, pp. 133–4.

## CHAPTER VII

### IN WHICH MONSIEUR GREUZE MAKES ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE GREAT AND FALLS IN LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

ALTHOUGH Greuze, as we have seen, deemed it expedient to mix as little as might be with his compatriots whilst in Rome, he had too much *savoir faire* to absent himself from the receptions of the Ambassador and his wife, both of whom were enthusiastic patrons of the Arts. Monsieur de Stainville had early perceived in Greuze an artist of the greatest promise; besides which, being himself a famous wit, he was amused at our painter's caustic sallies. The Ambassador had been among the first to admire Greuze's Italian *genre* pictures, which he had seen on one of his regular visits to the French Academy, whereby he kept in touch with the latest movements in Art.

It would appear that the name "de Stainville" has effectually hidden from Greuze's biographers and, indeed, from most writers on the French Academy in Rome, the identity of one of the greatest of modern French statesmen; for the Ambassador to the Vatican during the years of Greuze's sojourn in Italy was none other than the future Duc de Choiseul, of whom Horace

Walpole, in a letter to the Duchesse, dated January, 1771, writes :

" My Lord Chatham said in full Parliament that since the late Cardinal Richelieu, France had not had so great a Minister as the Duc de Choiseul."

Etienne François de Choiseul, always known as Comte de Stainville until his elevation to the dukedom in 1758, was born at Lunéville in 1719. Joining the army, he had won rapid promotion by the most intrepid valour, greatly distinguishing himself in the Bohemian campaign of 1740, at the battle of Dettingen in 1743, and in Flanders in 1745, whence he was sent home with the news of the capture of Charleroi. His services were rewarded in the latter year by the command of the crack regiment of Navarre, an honour which cost him 75,000 livres. Of this sum, he borrowed, according to custom, 35,000 livres at 5 per cent., the principal to be repaid when he received his marshal's bâton. He was present at the battle of Laufelt in 1747 and at the siege of Bergen-Op-Zoom, and returned to France on the conclusion of the war in the following year.

In 1750, the Comte married Louise-Honorine Crozat du Châtel, a mere child, but an extremely wealthy heiress and sister to the Duchesse de Gontaut. The marriage was another piece of the good fortune which followed him all the days of his life, for at that moment his financial position was a precarious one, and was not strengthened by his notoriously extravagant habits. Madame de Stainville has been acknowledged by general consent as one of the most delightful characters of the

eighteenth century. She was one of those rare women who would have been worthy of the fine compliment which Steele paid to Lady Elizabeth Hastings, when he said: "Though her mien carries much more invitation than command, to behold her is an immediate check to loose behaviour, whilst to love her is a liberal education."

"It is a pity," says the generally spiteful Madame du Deffand, "that she (the Comtesse) is an angel; I had rather she was a woman; but she has only virtues, not a single weakness, not one fault." She thought like an angel and wrote like Madame du Deffand herself, although she professed no other beliefs than those which prescribe virtue. She had a strong will, a good sense which nothing could impair, a penetrating judgment of men, women and affairs, and a faculty of always saying the right thing; so much elevation of feeling combined with her grace and modesty inspired passionate admiration, and disarmed the enemies of all those dear to her.

"This duchess," says M. Victor du Blé, "so superior to all the duchesses on earth, for ever on the look out for good actions, and knowing better than any one else where to discover them; this woman on whom eyes, mind and heart rest with such pleasure, has all the charm of small things, all the sublimity of great things; she affords the sensation of one of those little masterpieces of Rembrandt or Meissonier."

Even the frigid Horace Walpole waxes enthusiastic over her. "My last new passion," he says in a letter to Lady Hervey, in January 1766, "my last new

passion, and I think the strongest, is the Duchesse de Choiseul. Her face is pretty, not very pretty; her person a little model. Cheerful, modest, full of attentions, with the happiest propriety of expression, and greatest quickness of reason and judgment, you would take her for the queen of an allegory: one dreads its finishing, as much as a lover, if she would admit one, would wish it should finish." And again, in a letter to Gray written in the same month, he says: "The Duchess of Choiseul . . . is not very pretty, but has fine eyes, and is a little model in waxwork, which not being allowed to speak for some time as incapable, has a hesitation and modesty, the latter of which the Court has not cured, and the former of which is atoned for by the most interesting sound of voice, and forgotten in the most elegant turn and propriety of expression. Oh, it is the gentlest, amiable, civil little creature that ever came out of a fairy egg! so just in its phrases and thoughts, so attentive and good-natured! Everybody loves it but its husband, who prefers his own sister the Duchesse de Grammont, an Amazonian, fierce, haughty dame, who loves and hates arbitrarily, and is detested. Madame de Choiseul, passionately fond of her husband, was the martyr of this union, but at last submitted with a good grace; has gained a little credit with him, and is still believed to idolise him. But I doubt it—she takes too much pains to profess it."

In his last conjecture the writer appears to have overshot the mark, for all contemporaries agree that, in spite of the Comte's frequent *passades*, he was in

his way sincerely attached to his wife, and that she never allowed his conduct to ruffle her domestic happiness; and in his Memoirs, the Comte pays tribute to her in these words:

"Her virtue, her charms, her feelings towards him, and his towards her, gave to their union a happiness far superior to all advantages of fortune." *

In 1752, de Stainville, after opposing Madame de Pompadour for some time, made his peace and won her lifelong friendship and gratitude, by betraying to her the ambition of his cousin, Madame de Choiseul-Romanet, who, having succeeded in attracting the King's transient attentions, aspired to the position of royal favourite. After one more year of active service in Flanders, as brigadier-general under the Prince de Soubise, his treachery to his cousin (or shall we say his service to his cousin's husband?) was rewarded with the post of Ambassador to the Vatican, and he was given to understand that this was an earnest of still greater favours to come. Rome was at that particular moment perhaps the most important diplomatic post of all.

Before taking up his appointment, he spent every available moment "doing all that was in him to acquire instructions that would make his stay at Rome useful." † He found time, he says, to make an elaborate study of the principles and operations of European politics and all the details of the Papal Court. He reached Rome on November 5, 1754.

* *See Mémoires du Duc de Choiseul*, ed. by E. Calmette. † *Ibid.*

The Pope at this time was Benedict XIV, a pontiff whom Walpole, in a letter to Sir Horace Mann, dated June 20, 1757, describes as "Beloved by Papists, esteemed by Protestants, a priest without insolence or interest, a prince without favourites, a Pope without nepotism, an author without vanity; in short, a man whom neither wit nor power have been able to spoil."

It was de Stainville's tact and adroitness which persuaded Benedict to issue the famous Encyclical, known as *Ex Omnibus*, that terminated the long and bitter struggle of nearly half a century over the Bull *Unigenitus*; and from first to last his tenure of the Ambassadorship was brilliantly successful.

The Comte was an ugly little man, his figure, according to Sénac de Meilhan, "what one might call awkward"; but his manners were so frank, open and charming that as soon as he opened his mouth all these defects were forgotten. He was as lively, gay and witty as it was possible to be. Women doted on him. His wit was cutting, and ever on the alert; he had a mortal dread of being bored, and did not suffer fools gladly. Intensely proud of his rank, sometimes impetuous, but generally coldly calculating, he was a loyal friend, and a dangerous and utterly unscrupulous enemy. In him, one of the most subtle minds in Europe was concealed under an appearance of extreme flightiness and irresponsibility.

"No Minister since his day," says Dumouriez, an uncommonly good judge of character, "has equalled him. He possessed a wonderful penetration, and an

exceedingly just way of thinking. This enabled him to despatch public business with great rapidity, and sometimes rendered him inconsiderate. His disposition was naturally good, and he was not in the least vindictive. He was by far too indulgent towards those who surrounded him, and especially to his sister. . . . On learning that in the society which frequented the house of Mlle Legrand he was known as "Ptolemy," he only laughed. He was extremely extravagant. By way of flattering him, it was customary for his friends to have painted on their snuff-boxes his portrait facing that of Sully. Mlle Arnould, a celebrated singer at the Opera, having said very pleasantly that these pictures were Income and Expenditure personified, he immediately sent for and laughed heartily with her over this biting jest. He loaded with favour a man named Delille, who composed the famous verses entitled *The Christmas Carols of the Court*, in which he was satirised. In short, his virtues, his genius, his faults, his very vices, were all amiable." *

We need not wait either to subscribe to or combat all these eulogies; but such was the man who now befriended Greuze, and when the Comte saw the artist's Italian pictures he was so charmed with them that he immediately commissioned Greuze to paint the portraits of his wife and himself. This was the kind of opportunity which Greuze was not the man to let slip. He gave of his best, and every artistic circle in Rome

* *See* Dumouriez (C. F.) *Mémoires.*

SOPHIE ARNOULD

(Wallace Collection, London)

*Photo by Messrs. W. A. Mansell & Co., London*



was soon familiar with the name of Greuze as that of the most promising French artist in Italy. The portraits won him a letter of introduction from the Ambassador to the Duke Del Orr . . . one of the most influential members of the Roman nobility. This Prince was a widower, and had an only child, a charming and clever girl of eighteen, the Princess Letitia, who had a gift for painting, the cultivation of this talent being the greatest joy of her life.

The Duke gave our artist a hearty welcome, personally conducted him through his picture gallery, pointing out the examples of his favourite masters and asking his guest's opinion upon others. He spoke in the warmest terms of the drawings contained in the portfolio which Greuze had brought for his inspection, and accepted with delight the pencil study of the woman's head for the artist's picture *Le Geste Napolitain*, which the latter presented to him. Being a man of taste and discrimination, he at once divined his visitor's quality. He saw, lurking in the depth of his eyes, one of those beautiful dreams of which an artist is made. The Duke took a fancy to the young man, with his pleasant manners and tactful bearing, and before the interview was over, proposed that Greuze should give his daughter a course of lessons in painting—a proposal which we need scarcely say was readily accepted. It would be difficult to exaggerate Greuze's delight at this unexpected stroke of good fortune, for he was anything but rich, and no Frenchman ever had any serious objection to a pretty woman being numbered among his pupils.

Our artist awaited the first lesson with mingled feelings of curiosity, excitement, and nervousness. He was always fastidious in his dress, and when the great day arrived we may be sure that he might have ruffed it with the best.

Whilst he is busy preparing himself for a meeting which was destined to have an important influence on his life, we will take the opportunity of borrowing his pencil and sketching as closely as we can the portrait of the man as reflected in his mirror. He has himself made the task easier for us by the care he took in painting the two or three finished portraits of himself which have come down to us. If we make allowance for the few years which passed before he painted them, and add what he, his friends, and his enemies have told us, we shall get a very fair idea of his personal appearance at this time; whilst his moral nature, which shall concern us later, has been sketched with equal care by his contemporaries. On the day of which we speak, then, his mirror reflected a strong, sinuous figure, slightly below middle height, a well poised and shapely head, abundant hair falling in blonde curls over his ears and brushed straight back in front from a broad, white brow. The face is closely shaven, the features regular, full of character and *finesse*. The large and luminous eyes shine, bright and penetrating, from the shadow of the massive forehead; the cheek-bones are high, the chin decisive, the nose bold in outline, and finely curved. There is a touch of irony in the rather thin, straight-cut mouth; in eyes and mouth alike more than a hint that the man

PORTRAIT OF J. B. GREUZE

(Louvre, Paris)

*Photo by Lévy et ses frères*

PORTRAIT OF J. B. GREUZE

(Louvre, Paris)

Photo de Braun et Cie



saw everything he had made, and, behold, it was very good!—a strong, handsome face, and attractive withal. If we look well into it we shall see there much benevolence, a robust confidence in life, a most subtle intelligence, adroit in overcoming difficulties and in turning all men and all things to account. Wit, address, courage, worldly wisdom, and a self-confidence proof against every reverse of fortune, such indeed were the dominant traits of the artist's character.

The midday splendour of a June sun streamed into the spacious, irregularly shaped chamber, half drawing-room and half studio, into which Greuze was conducted to await the coming of his pupil. The light fell on the easel, the model's platform, the tawny backs of the canvases leaning against the walls, and struck golden patches on the polished oak floor. The sex of the owner of the room was revealed by the comfortable chairs, the luxurious sofa, the finely inlaid harpsichord, the dainty writing desk, and, above all, by the subtle harmony of the arrangement of the flowers in the priceless vases. With one comprehensive glance, the artist's eye took in all these details, and then his ear caught the sound of light footsteps and the surging of silk drapery in the hall; there was a pause, a hurried whisper at the door; and a moment later, the Princess entered, followed by her nurse—a lovable, garrulous, old dame, who might have stepped straight out of *Romeo and Juliet*.

The Princess Letitia, a brunette, sweet and lissome, moved with the languid grace of a young hind encoun-

tered in a sunlit forest glade. "She had the head of Cleopatra," Greuze tells us. Her face gleamed, like pale gold, beneath the soft and lustrous masses of her hair. The modelling of her figure would have filled a sculptor with joy, nor was the sight of it less grateful to a man who happened to be only a painter. She had extraordinary eyes, very dark, yet full of light, humid, like twin stars shining through tears, tired, languorous, half closed as by the weight of their lids and their long silken lashes. The sweetness of her mouth Greuze's brush alone could render; and it has done so. It was a cool, vivid mouth, tender, and moist as with the dews of heaven. Her voice was like the song of the sirens, and she had the throat of a young goddess. . . . But I think we will wait for the artist at her throat. Most Frenchmen seem to have a genius for indiscretion when they set out to describe the charms of a beautiful woman.

Greuze and his pupil gazed into each other's eyes, fascinated.

So ended the first lesson.

## CHAPTER VIII

### IN WHICH MONSIEUR GREUZE WINS THE LOVE OF A GREAT LADY

From the moment they saw each other for the first time, master and pupil took an ever increasing pleasure and interest in the lessons, and particularly in each other. The progress made by the Princess in her painting was almost, though not quite, as rapid, as the progress made by the painter in winning her heart. "I soon perceived," he naïvely tells us, "that the facility with which I saw her and the frequency of my visits were becoming dangerous to the tranquillity of Letitia's heart. I perceived, in short, that it was my happiness to please her. Had it not been for the love which I myself felt for my beautiful pupil, I should, no doubt, have been less clear-sighted; but I loved her with all the faculties of my soul: I loved her as a man does love at twenty; and my own tenderness enlightened me as to that which I inspired in Letitia." *

Modesty, as the reader has, doubtless, already had reason to observe, was never one of our artist's failings. Many a man has made an ass of himself because he believed a woman to be in love with him when she was not; but,

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

fortunately for Greuze, his perspicacity in this case was not at fault.

One day, when Greuze was with her, he saw her suddenly turn pale and her hands begin to tremble. She tried to make light of her emotion, and seemed to have made up her mind not to look at him, and even to treat him with disdain. But when she attempted to speak, the words died on her lips ; her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. Then she seemed to be seized with a kind of vertigo, and abruptly rising from her seat at the easel, she fled from the room without a word to the astonished painter. Greuze was alarmed, and scarcely knew what to think of it all ; but after passing half an hour in vainly waiting for her return, he went home.

On the artist's next visit, he found Letitia cold and distant ; there was even a touch of hostility in her bearing. Greuze anxiously asked himself what he could have said or done to offend her ; yet he dared not question her for fear of receiving an answer which would give him pain. Her coldness filled him with despair. He told himself that he had forfeited her love. So great was his grief that he even went so far as to think he might have been mistaken in his diagnosis of Letitia's complaint. There is nothing like uncertainty as to the affection of the woman he loves to take the conceit out of a man. Greuze, for his part, was humble enough at that time. The pair felt so much embarrassment that they were almost glad when the lesson was over.

But the Princess did not love Greuze less. On the contrary, she loved him more than ever. What had

happened was that the state of her heart had, for the first time, been suddenly revealed to her. Love had come to her, and she knew it. It had come to her without warning, at a moment when she was dreaming of something else; it had taken her off her guard, and she was a little frightened.

Women, however, quickly adapt themselves to new conditions, and Letitia soon gave her master unmistakable signs of her affection for him.

"This discovery," he says, "made me for a short time the happiest man on earth. I adored one of the most beautiful women in Italy, and I was loved by her in return!" *

He might well crow! It was certainly an extraordinary piece of luck for the poor tiler's son from Tournus, and for anybody else's son, for the matter of that.

"But my felicity," he proceeds, "was of short duration. I had too great a respect for the happiness of my dear Princess to deliver up to her the secret of my heart. I determined to hide from her both my love and my despair at being unable to abandon myself, without remorse, to the lively and tender sentiments which she inspired in me. Since fortune and birth had raised an insurmountable barrier between us, I resolved to absent myself from the Palais Del Orr. . . ." †

Separated from the woman he loved, our artist's "lively and tender sentiments" gave him no rest, and he fell into a state of terrible dejection. He lost all

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

† Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

interest in life and in art. When he attended the Academy classes, he looked so miserable that his fellow students, who had some inkling of the truth, made fun of him, and the irrepressible Fragonard, in allusion to his golden curls, dubbed him "The Cherub in love." He really was very unhappy, and what added to his torment was the thought that Letitia suffered as much and in the same way as he did. His fears were only too well founded. The young Princess had fallen seriously ill, and none of her friends could tell what was the matter with her. This news was reported to the artist, and served only to increase his love for her. At all hours of the day and night he wandered about near the Duke's palace. Not a day passed without his calling to inquire as to the state of her health. Again and again he was tempted to return to her and confess his love. But, he says, her well-being was more precious to him than all else on earth, and at whatever cost to himself, he determined that she should not spoil her young life for love of him.

Meanwhile, his work was neglected. He could settle down to nothing. Hours were wasted in idle dreaming of what might have been. He suffered tortures from his prudence, tortures from his passion. Then one day, whilst he was drawing in Saint Peter's, the Duke happened to enter the church, and seeing the artist, accosted and reproached him with neglecting for so long to visit the palace. The Prince said he had just acquired two heads by Titian, and insisted on Greuze accompanying him home, in order to give his opinion of the pictures.

"My daughter desires to copy them," he added, "when she has sufficiently recovered. I hope you will come and help her with the paintings; she herself has expressed a wish for you to do so." *

The Duke was so friendly, his invitation so cordial, and he appeared to have such a genuine regard for the artist, that Greuze hardly knew what to reply or what excuse to make for not going. And then, the thought of again seeing Letitia thrilled him to the heart. The temptation was too strong. As he was silent, and evidently wavering, the Duke became still more pressing. A relative of his, he said, was most anxious to have copies of the Titians made with as little delay as possible, and begged Greuze, as a personal favour, to resume his visits to the palace and execute the copies. Finding it impossible to refuse such a request from a man for whom he felt the greatest esteem, the artist consented to do the work.

Whilst Greuze was working at the palace, the Princess was still confined to her room, and the artist did not fail to inquire after her of the nurse each day without, however, letting it appear that he desired to see her. But the nurse, he says, who had brought Letitia up from a little child and loved her as her own daughter, divined the state of his heart, and was imprudent enough to tell her young mistress of her discovery, and made matters even worse by adding that doubtless only his respect and the fear of offending her prevented him

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

from declaring his passion. Like all Italian women, says Greuze, Letitia had an ardent imagination and hot blood in her veins, and she was overwhelmed with joy at the thought that he loved her. She implored her nurse to procure her a secret interview with the painter, as it was of vital importance that she should speak to him of a project she had formed on which depended the happiness of her whole life.

The nurse, a soft creature, was moved by Letitia's prayers, and immediately went off to find the artist, in order to conduct him to her room.

"As I made my way to her," says Greuze, "I trembled with pleasure and with pain, but I remember," he naïvely adds, "that the pleasure prevailed over the pain. You see, I was so very much in love!" *

It was a very pale and thin Letitia who greeted him with a wan smile on the threshold of her room. She trembled in all her limbs. Her eyes were downcast, and a faint flush suffused her face and spread softly until it was hidden in the lace at her throat. Her eyes were bright with unshed tears. Never had she appeared more beautiful to him. For some moments the lovers remained silent, both painfully embarrassed. But the good nurse's curiosity had been aroused; she wanted to hear the famous project of which the Princess had spoken. She reminded her young mistress of the object of the artist's visit. Letitia drew in her breath sharply, sighed and pressed her hand against her heart. Her flushed face was quivering now: she seemed to be

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

struggling to keep back her tears. At last, with eyes still downcast, she murmured rapidly:

"Monsieur Greuze, I love you! Though you may think my conduct strange, yet my heart is pure, and you cannot, without injustice, refuse me your esteem——"*

She stopped abruptly, as she had begun, and appeared to await his answer.

But Greuze was a prey to such conflicting emotions that he was unable to utter a word.

Then the sweet voice was heard again:

"Yes, Monsieur Greuze, I love you. . . Tell me frankly, do you love me?" †

The artist says he would willingly have given all that he had to be able to tell her that he loved her more than all else on earth; that he worshipped the very ground she walked upon; that he would esteem himself the happiest of men to live for her or to die for her. But he could not say a word.

Surprised and mortified by his silence, the Princess sank into a chair, buried her face in her hands, and wept bitterly. The sight of her tears brought the artist to his senses. He flung himself down on his knees, and passionately kissed her feet. The spell was broken at last. He poured out his heart to her.

Most men, I suppose, are eloquent at least once in their lives; and we have every reason to believe that Greuze, when once he had found his tongue, had no less to say for himself, and said it no worse, than another in his happy position. The exact words he used on this

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.* † Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

occasion have not come down to us ; but, then, language is not the most convincing method of expressing the emotions ; and I suspect the artist (although he seems to have had an uncommonly good memory for these conversations with the Princess) had a very hazy notion of what actually he did say. She was obviously satisfied both as to manner and matter : that was the main point. Just as Homer, instead of attempting to describe Helen's beauty, gives us a far more vivid impression by simply describing its effect on a group of old men, so Greuze contents himself with telling us the effect of his eloquence on the woman he loved.

She drew him close to her. For some moments they sat side by side, and neither of them spoke. Both were very pale. The tears still gathered in Letitia's eyes, and fell slowly and unheeded on to his hands, which held hers. Then, with a profound sigh, her head sank on to his shoulder. . . Still no word was spoken.

The Princess wiped her eyes, and looked into the artist's face. Then, abruptly, she gave herself into his arms. Scarcely breathing, they remained locked in a close embrace. They felt their hearts beating as one. Greuze kissed her hair. She lifted her head towards him, and he felt her burning mouth pressed to his. As he kissed her, her face became transfigured. A grave, tender, almost maternal look came into her eyes—the look which comes into every woman's eyes when she yields herself up to love.

But, the reader will ask, what was the devoted old

nurse, who, we are told, "loved the Princess as her own child," doing all this time? I really do not know. Her account of the episode has not come into my hands. If it had, the foregoing pages might possibly need modification. But for my part, I have accepted Greuze's narrative so far that I do not now intend to spoil his story by entertaining belated and unworthy suspicions as to its accuracy. Is it too much to ask a similar indulgence of the reader? Perhaps the good nurse was as loath as I am to break in upon such a pretty idyll.

Having said so much, let us go back to our turtledoves. When at length they returned to earth, Letitia's eyes shone with a grave joy.

"Now I can be happy!" she cried, clapping her hands, and running to embrace her nurse.

"Listen to me, both of you," she continued. "Here is my plan. I love Greuze, and I am going to marry him!"

"My dearest lady!" exclaimed the nurse, "how can you dream of such a thing? Your father——"

"I know what you are going to say, my good nurse," interrupted the Princess. "My father will never consent to such a proposal. I know he will not. He wants me to marry his eternal Casa . . . , the oldest and ugliest man you ever set eyes on, or young Count Palleri . . . , whom I neither know nor want to know. I am rich, for my mother's fortune is mine to do what I like with. I shall give it to Greuze. I shall marry him, and he will take me to France. And when we are settled, you

shall follow us, my dear nurse, to witness our happiness and to share in it."

Then, with the most delightful volubility, she set out in detail the advantages of living in Paris. It was her will that Greuze should continue his artistic career, and that he should in due time become a second Titian, a painter whom she greatly admired. She insisted that Greuze was to become so famous that her father would be proud to have such a man for his son-in-law.

"Are you not delighted with my project?" she cried enthusiastically.*

Greuze was, and said so. Who can blame him? He was not made of stone; on the contrary. . . . We must not judge him too hardly. He was an essentially upright fellow, and really did his best to think of his humble birth and to keep a level head; but he was a very inflammable person; it was his first serious passion; he was quite unattached, and had all his life kept himself free of vulgar entanglements. Under the circumstances, I dare say that a beautiful princess, very much in love, might play the deuce with any man's philosophy.

As Greuze says, his mind was in a whirl, and revolved around the one idea of his happiness at finding himself so passionately loved by this delightfully fresh and charming girl.

"Yes," he used to say in after years, "I shall not die without having tasted happiness. Life can offer a man no greater joy than to feel himself loved, just as he is with all his faults, by a good woman; and she who gave

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

me that exquisite pleasure was one of the best, one of the most beautiful women in the world. The memory of the few weeks that I passed in her society is enshrined in my heart as the most blissful, the most perfect recollection of my life!

"With heart and soul drunk with the passion I felt towards Letitia," he proceeds, "and my mind occupied solely with the alluring perspective which her love opened out to me, I formed, with the help of my dear Princess, a thousand wild projects, which at the time appeared to us the most reasonable in the world, with a view to facilitating our union. At last we separated, enchanted, enraptured with each other, and promising ourselves to meet again very soon, to put into execution our plans for uniting ourselves for ever.

"But by the time I reached home, my Eden had entirely disappeared. One touch of cold reason was sufficient to destroy my rapture and to leave me a prey to the most distressing emotions. Soon, my conscience began to reproach me for exposing myself to the danger of again seeing the Princess, for having listened to her, and for having approved of her determination to leave her father in order to follow me. I pictured to myself Letitia striking despair and death into her father's heart. I saw her pursued by his malediction, stricken and moaning with remorse, even in my arms. These thoughts restored me to my senses; my hopes vanished with my illusions; and I was left alone with my love." *

From these words it would appear that even at this

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

early period of his career he could not bear the thought of calling a paternal malediction down upon his own or upon any one else's head. He could conceive of no greater terror than that ; and the fear of it for the time being cooled his ardour.

Times and manners change. Nowadays, when a man has made up his mind to marry a girl, he is not so easily put off. Her father's curses leave him unruffled. He snaps his fingers at such trifles. But in Greuze's day, these things were taken seriously. A threat of this kind added a new terror to death, and was sufficient to raise the hair of the most indifferent.

" The moment that succeeded the awakening of my reason," he continues, " was terrible. Honour demanded that I should thrust back the sweet image of Letitia sharing my love, and herself offering me a happiness which I had never dared to hope for, and would willingly have purchased with my heart's blood. I resolved on the bitter necessity of bringing the dear girl to reason, of making her face the facts, and of opening her eyes to the impassable gulf fixed between us. I would sacrifice myself on the altar of her happiness, and seek to persuade her to forget me and comply with her father's wishes." *

It all sounds very fine, but some will think that he might have done worse than consult Letitia on the matter. Yet it is clear that he meant well, and whatever we may think of his conduct, his sentiments, at least, were beyond reproach.

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

When he next saw the Princess, it would be difficult, he assures us, to give even a remote idea of his suffering. His eyes were red and blood-shot, for it is natural for a young Frenchman on such occasions to drown his sorrow in tears, just as a man of more phlegmatic temper might drown his in drink. And who shall deny that the first method is as reasonable and at least as effective as the second? Such a signal victory over a tender heart, as Greuze justly says, is not to be won without tears.

Letitia was surprised at his sadness, as well she might be! She had not yet discovered that her lover had a head like a weathercock so far as her sex was concerned. She received him with laughing eyes, and simply made fun of his gloom.

"How terrible it was!" he exclaims, "to have to undeceive her! What courage it needed to tell her that it was I, I who adored her, who, through an excess of love, renounced her!" *

When he looks back upon this episode of his youth, the poor fellow is simply breathless at the nobility of his conduct. He returns to it again and again. He insists on our seeing it with his eyes. But, with the best will in the world, we cannot help thinking that his behaviour was very like that of the immortal Georgie Porgie, who, it will be remembered, kissed the girls and made them cry, but, we are told, such was his waywardness, that when the girls came out to play, Georgie Porgie ran away.

Letitia made him repeat his resolution several times

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

over before she could believe him to be in earnest. She thought he was merely putting her tenderness to the proof. She almost drove him to despair, by repeating mechanically that she loved him and would have no other husband. And at last, when she realised that he fully meant what he said, she turned furiously upon him and overwhelmed him with reproaches. He was a false and barbarous wretch, without feeling, and had feigned to love her, only that he might the better rend her heart. Her frame shook with dry sobs ; she tore her hair, wrung her hands, ordered him out of her sight. The nurse tried to soothe her, but she was not to be comforted.

The sight of her anguish brought Greuze once more to her feet. For the moment he forgot himself, forgot everything but that he was near her. Again he felt her head nestling on his shoulder ; again he breathed the perfume of her hair. He swore blindly to devote his whole life to her. He would never leave her. Her lightest wish should be law to him. He could say no less ; and the sincerity with which he said it at length pacified her, and she smiled through her tears.

The lovers parted without discussing the future which on the previous day had made them so happy. They dared not recall the ecstasy of that golden hour.

## CHAPTER IX

### IN WHICH MONSIEUR GREUZE'S ITALIAN LOVE STORY IS BROUGHT TO A CONCLUSION

But that importunate conscience of his would give our friend no rest. When he was in the presence of his divinity, he was all fervour and sighs, but no sooner had he left her than he was all sighs and doubts as to whether he had made an effective display of the nobility of his soul; and he invariably came to the conclusion that he had not. The fact of the matter is that he was one of those men who, though strong and resolute in the practical affairs of life, soften and become as clay in the hands of a pretty woman. Throughout his life, any woman who pleased him could twist him round her little finger; as, indeed, she seldom failed to do. It was not his fault. He was built that way. It is easy for those who are out of the wood to make game of him.

Once more, he decided that it was impossible to continue visiting the Princess and keep a tight hand on his emotions. Casting about for a plausible excuse for absenting himself a second time from the palace, he hit upon that of a feigned illness. It was not, however, necessary to make pretence for long, as he soon fell ill in deadly earnest. As he elegantly expresses it: "The

passion which burnt in my soul at length set my blood on fire, and I was seized with fever; and for three weeks I was delirious."

Letitia, we are told, followed the course of his illness in an agony of suspense, and when at length his youth and his sound constitution had shaken off the malady, she begged him to have pity on her and resume his visits to the palace. And, of course, he went. What else could he do?

During his absence, the Duke had invited and was now daily expecting the visit of Count Palleri . . . to whom he intended to marry his daughter.

So Greuze and the Princess saw each other again. But they spoke no more of love, though their eyes, he says, "sometimes betrayed to each the secret of the other."

The day before the Count was expected to arrive, Letitia, in telling her lover the news, said:

"Then all is over! Nobody will help me. I must either combat my father's will single-handed or resign myself to a life of misery . . . Poor Letitia!" she sighed, "every one has abandoned her!" *

Her head sank on her breast; she hid her face in her hands and wept bitterly.

The nurse tried to console her; whilst Greuze caught her hand, and pressed it to his lips.

"Dearest love!" he cried, his good resolutions scattered to the four winds, under the stress of his emotion. "Dearest love! for pity's sake do not give

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

way to despair. I cannot bear it! You tear my heart. At least wait until you have seen the Count before persuading yourself that it would be a misfortune to marry him. . . . They say he is good, amiable, intelligent——"

"What is that to me, even if he is an angel from Heaven!" interrupted Letitia, almost peevishly. "I don't want him. I don't want anybody! Leave me alone!" *

She snatched her hand away, and walked rapidly up and down the room.

"I am convinced," says Greuze when recounting the scene, "that had I not kept my eyes constantly fixed upon a portrait of the Duke hanging on the wall opposite me, I should have forgotten everything. I should have again sworn to his daughter that I was prepared to follow blindly the sentiment which attached me to her; I should have told her that she, and she alone, should command my fate. But the sight of the Duke's face revived my weakening reason, and gave me the strength to employ the most tender eloquence in order to persuade Letitia to obey her father's wishes." †

Nobody, I think, will deny the ingenuity of Greuze's method of overcoming a natural weakness under very trying circumstances; and if the reader should at any time be tempted to run away with a princess, I would venture to commend the experiment to his most careful consideration.

Although our friend did not succeed in obtaining Letitia's promise to marry his rival, he at length had the

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.* † Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

satisfaction of seeing her less distressed. Having succeeded in convincing her that his conduct, in spite of appearances, was not the result of a diminished love for her, Letitia ended by pitying him—a sentiment in which, I think, most readers will share. The meeting ended in tears and kisses.

When the artist next visited the palace, the Count had arrived from Naples, his native place. He was a handsome, agreeable man, a devoted art-lover and a discriminating critic; wealthy and freehanded, he was a man, as his rival readily admitted, in every way worthy of winning and holding the affection of a refined and sensitive woman.

"I admit to my shame," says the unhappy Greuze, "that, at first, the Count's many advantages caused me acute suffering, for I thought, with bitterness, that it would be easy for such a fascinating man to make his intended wife forget me." *

Our friend was introduced to his rival, who greatly admired his paintings, and assured the artist that all the world would soon be speaking of them. He next made Greuze many generous offers, which the latter rather coldly refused. The artist, however, had the consolation of seeing that Letitia looked upon the Count with the utmost indifference. Her eyes filled with tears whenever mention of her forthcoming marriage was made. This evidence of her love for him, says Greuze, though it pained him, was not without its charm, for he

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

found it hard to overcome his jealousy sufficiently to be civil to the Count.

Determined not to be a witness of a happiness which he envied, Greuze resolved to leave Rome. He therefore called upon the Princess, to say good-bye to her for ever. She had just signed her marriage contract, and the artist found her in tears.

"Then you hate the Count," he cried. "You hate him!"

"No!" Letitia replied, giving him her hand, "I even feel that if I did not love you, he might have been able to please me. He suits my father; and I shall marry him without repugnance; but my heart is yours."

She stopped abruptly.

Then Greuze told her that he was about to leave her for ever.

"For ever!" she repeated, crying softly. Then, clearing her throat of tears, she begged him to defer his departure until he could comply with a request which she knew her father wished to make. After obtaining his promise, she spoke to him of his own affairs, and sought to forget her sorrow in order not to lose any of the joy which could be extracted out of these last golden hours together.*

There were no more tears. She seems to have made it a point of honour to be cheerful and to look her best, so that the impression her lover carried away with him

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

should be one of perfect beauty and of perfect serenity. And it was so that he always remembered her.

A few days after this interview, the Duke asked Greuze to paint the portrait of his daughter, as he wished to make a present of it to his future son-in-law. The artist remembered his promise to the Princess, and was unwilling to break it ; but he was also unwilling to work for his fortunate rival. He therefore proposed that the Duke should keep the new portrait of Letitia, and that he should give the Count a portrait which he had a few months previously commissioned another artist to paint. Without inquiring into the reason which dictated this proposal, the Duke agreed to do as Greuze suggested. So our friend's pupil, for the first and last time, became his model.

These were hours of pure joy. He forgot his sorrows, the triumph of his rival, the approaching bitterness of renunciation—everything in short—and became absorbed in the glorious task of transmitting to canvas and immortalising the charms of his dear Princess, who would so soon pass out of his life for ever. With love guiding his brush, he painted as he had never painted before.

" As I had only to make a faithful representation of my perfect model," he tells us, " I made a delicious picture of her ; and secretly, I made a copy of the portrait for myself. I have it still, and I made use of it for the figure of the young girl in my picture *L'Embarras d'une Couronne*. Those who know that picture can judge whether the Princess was beautiful ! I did not tell

her," he proceeds, "that I had made the copy: she knew that I should always carry her portrait in my heart." *

That was true in a way, but Letitia was not by any means the woman who made the most lasting impression on his life and art. In spite of her charms, in spite of the fact that the hours he spent with her were the happiest of his life, she was but a passing influence. She was the first woman who had really touched his heart, and had, for the moment, made him forget that other woman whose image had until then so persistently haunted him; but that was all. It was not her beauty that suggested to him the type which we recognise as the Greuze girl.

It is not quite clear what the artist meant by his title *L'Embarras d'une Couronne*; but this is my theory, and I give it for what it is worth.

The picture represents a kneeling girl, who has just laid upon a sculptured, woodland shrine, dedicated to the fickle son of Venus, her votive offering of flowers of many colours, a pair of white doves, a beautiful blue garment, and a golden flagon. Her toilet, of white drapery, exquisitely painted and very skilfully arranged, is so simple as to leave to the imagination little of the beauty of her form. She is a pretty brunette, with pure brow, yearning black eyes, virgin flesh, and dark hair falling in scientific disarray on her firm, round shoulders; the hands are clasped, and the whole figure tingles with the ardour of her invocation. The suppli-

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

catory attitude is very becoming in woman; it gives a subtle and unique charm to the soft lines of her figure. It is a point on which few women for long remain ignorant. With the Greuze girl it is a favourite posture. The artist knew by experience how difficult it is for a mere man to resist a beautiful woman when she thus makes of her weakness a weapon of offence. That was one of the things he had learned from Letitia. In the present instance, even the God of Love has found himself unable to turn a deaf ear to such a sweet suppliant, and, in token of his good will, has given her a crown of roses and myrtles. But now that she has been granted her heart's desire, what is the use of a crown to her? She does not know what to do with it. "I ask you," she seems to say, "does one put a hat over a halo?"

Of course, the artist's mind may have been occupied with quite other ideas; but it is a charming piece of work, and so his precise meaning does not perhaps matter very much. "We might imagine," say the de Goncourts, "that we see in this picture, Innocence confessing to Love—a bas-relief of Dorat, over which passes the flame of Anacreon." I dare say they knew what they meant. At any rate, it sounds very pretty, and everybody is entitled to his opinion and his own way of expressing it. Nobody, I think, will quarrel with them over the matter.

It should be said here that Diderot's opinion of this picture was not so favourable. "The head of the young girl," he says, "is charming; but this head is of one age, whilst the rest of the figure is of another.

VOTIVE OFFERING

(Wallace Collection, London)

*Photo by Messrs. W. A. Mansell & Co., London*



The shoulder is too small. The right leg is badly modelled. The foot is too thick. The figure is badly draped. The landscape is heavy and laboured. The accessories are perfunctory. The pigeons brought as an offering are so smooth that one hardly knows whether they have feathers. The little statue of Cupid is well modelled and the colouring is good; but, in the fear of making him appear unnatural, the artist has made of him an ugly little Savoyard, a regular little monkey. Greuze knows the beau ideal in his style; but he does not recognise it in this. If the hands of the young girl had been better coloured, they would have come out in stronger relief against her throat. If the background had been less heavy, the figures would have appeared less mean; those enormous tree trunks against which they are set crush them. . . I might add that the tints of the throat are grey, dirty even; that you do not know whether this throat is in the light or whether it is not; that the drapery is nothing but an accumulation of little folds, whilst that of the breasts, which one sees, is too low and too open. It is more pleasing to me to praise than to criticise, as you will see."

There is a good deal of truth (as, indeed, there always is) in Diderot's remarks; but it is strange to find the author of *Jacques le Fataliste*, to say nothing of the *Bijoux Indiscrets*, criticising an artist for draping his figures insufficiently. Knowing him as we do, we should have thought that his friend could not possibly have given him a too generous display of his model's charms. But Diderot is right about the girl's leg; the pose of

the figure shows a certain unfamiliarity with the theory of equilibrium, for the least movement, it seems to me, would send her flat on her pretty nose—and that would be a pity! But this is perhaps hypercritical.

When this picture came to be engraved, Greuze dedicated the plate to the Princesse Pignatelli. Is it too much to assume that this was Letitia's real name—a clue to the delusive initials under which the discreet Madame de Valori saw fit to veil the heroine of the artist's Italian love story? The surmise is perhaps strengthened by the fact that the original canvas was bought by the Duke de Choiseul, who, as we have seen, was an intimate friend of Letitia's father during his tenure of the Ambassadorship at Rome.

On the death of that expensive nobleman, his widow sold his magnificent collection of pictures, in order to pay his debts, and retired into a convent. At this sale, in 1772, the picture fetched 5,650 livres. It afterwards passed into the possession of the Marquis of Hertford, and is now one of the gems of the Wallace Gallery.

At the end of the last sitting, the Princess took a pair of scissors, cut off a lock of her hair, and handed it to the painter, together with a little sachet, which she had worn in her bosom, as souvenirs of this passionate episode of their lives. Her last words to him were:

"Greuze, think of me sometimes; and believe me when I say that never shall I forget all the happiness that I owe to you!" *

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

The Count was so delighted with Greuze's portrait of his fiancée that he begged the artist to make a copy of it for him, but the latter refused, giving as a pretext that urgent business compelled him to return immediately to France. The fact of the matter was that he dared not trust himself any longer, for Letitia had told him that he had only to say the word, and she was ready, even at the eleventh hour, to abandon everything and follow him. He had honestly tried to banish her image from his mind, but on receiving this last message, he was again seized with the horrors of indecision. This would never do! The poor tiler's son from Tournus had very sound notions as to the practice of life, and had determined that it was only by setting reason at the helm that he could hope to bring his ship safely to port. It may be that his heart failed him before the high adventure; or, at any rate, he felt that the victory over his emotions was not sufficiently decisive to warrant much confidence in the strength of his resolution. And so, as he could not remain insensible to the voice of the siren moaning in the soft Italian twilight, he gathered together his belongings, and fled post haste to Civita Vecchia, whence he took the first ship to Marseilles. It was thus that he had the courage not to say, or, as some will think, had not the courage to say, the word which would have made Letitia his for ever.

"The adored image of this amiable and interesting Princess," the artist says, "was for long after our separation the unique object of my thoughts." We can well believe it.

Such was the story which Greuze, in his old age, told to his girl pupils (among whom was Madame C. de Valori, the narrator), when one of them ventured the opinion that, in an affair of the heart, it was rare, very rare, to find a man sufficiently generous to sacrifice his happiness in the interest of the woman he loved. Some even went so far as to maintain that it was impossible to cite a single example of such devotion.

"Very well, Mesdames," he said, "if you will have the goodness to listen to me for a few moments, I may perhaps be so happy as to offer you an example of what you maintain to be impossible." * And he proceeded forthwith to tell the story which I have set out in the foregoing pages.

For eight years after his flight back to France, Greuze had no news of Letitia. Then an Italian nobleman, an intimate friend of the Princess and her husband, coming to the famous artist's studio in Paris, to have his portrait painted, spoke of her and assured Greuze of her happiness. A few months later, the artist received a letter from her. This was the beginning of a regular correspondence between the former lovers, which was maintained until the death of the Princess.

"She left," says Greuze, "a large family, inconsolable at her loss: a tender wife, the best of mothers, she was beloved by all who had the privilege of knowing her."

The artist appears to have been in the habit of confiding all his troubles to her, and he says that her letters brought him the consolation of the most tender

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

friendship in those misfortunes, peculiar to the conjugal state, of which he was destined to have more than his share. He makes it clear that her death was a grievous blow to him.

"Yes, my dear Greuze," she wrote in one of her letters which he quotes, "your former pupil has now become the good mother of a family. I have five charming children, whom I adore. My eldest daughter would be worthy to sit as a model for your own happy pencil. She is as beautiful as an angel! Ask Prince Dest . . . if it is not so! We are the happiest family in the world. My husband loves me so much that he almost makes me believe I am still young and pretty. As I have already told you, all this happiness and all the respect of those around me I owe to you! And every day of my life I remember that it was your generosity which prevented me from breaking my father's heart. He is proud of my happiness, thinking that it is his work, and I have not the heart to undeceive him! My good father loves you as much as ever. He was filled with joy, when the faith he always had in you was justified by the event. As for me, when the name of Greuze penetrated to this remote corner of Italy and thus gave me the assurance of your fame, I returned thanks to Heaven, and felt very proud that I, too, had divined in you the promise of the celebrity which you now enjoy."

"You see, Mesdames," Greuze would add, when telling his story, "the well-being of Letitia caused me to sacrifice my own interest in order to ensure hers. Had I listened to my love, I should perhaps have avoided

the misfortunes which have laid waste so many years of my life. I did not listen to it ; and all that remains to me is the sweet satisfaction of being able to say that I fulfilled the duty of an honest man ; and it is a reward of which I am jealous ! " *

And that is the end of Monsieur Greuze's Italian love story.

* Mme de Valori. *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER X

IN WHICH MONSIEUR GREUZE, ON HIS RETURN TO FRANCE, FINDS WOMAN AT THE HELM, AND OF SOME PORTRAITS HE PAINTED.

When Greuze reached France, the Petticoat dynasty was at the height of its power. The former Demoiselle Poisson, whom the King's kiss had raised almost to the throne, was so firmly established in her position that, by the aid of the ingenious expedient of the Parc aux Cerfs, she had already begun to serve the King in a less intimate, though scarcely less dishonourable, capacity than she had hitherto done.

About this time, her husband, Monsieur Lenormand d'Étioles, sought and found consolation for his wife's defection in the arms of Mademoiselle Rem, an operatic nymph who enjoyed a high reputation for gallantry. Madame de Pompadour was very much shocked at such a scandalous entanglement, and, in her solicitude for her husband's honour, offered him the Turkish Ambassadorship, in the hope of separating him from his charmer; but such was the unfortunate man's infatuation that he refused the appointment rather than face this separation. After the death of the Marquise, the not inconsolable widower went to the length of marrying his beloved

Rem, which gave an unknown wit the occasion for the following epigram :

> " Pour réparer miseriam
> Que Pompadour laisse à la France,
> Lenormant, plein de conscience,
> Vient d'épouser Rem publicam."

The Seven Years' War had begun, as it was destined to continue and to end, with disaster for France. The country was well on the road to ruin, but, under the fostering care of the incomparable Marquise, the Arts flourished exceedingly.

Under her, woman's influence was supreme. " Woman was, in fact, the governing principle, the reason which directs, and the voice which commands." She makes her power felt in a thousand different ways, in every condition of life. " She is," say the de Goncourts, " the universal and vital cause, the origin of events, the source of all things. Nothing escapes her; she holds everything in her hand, the King and parliaments, public opinion, and the Academy." She owed this ascendancy not only to her grace and beauty, but to her merit, her wit, her intellect. She was interested in everything. She could discuss the laws of Nature with Buffon, the higher mathematics with d'Alembert, or exchange quite unprintable pleasantries with Voisenon or Boufflers, without turning a hair. It has been well said that the history of the eighteenth century appears to have been written at her knees.

Women brought the study of science and the Arts into fashion. Many society ladies were skilful mu-

sicians, well informed in the sciences, good linguists, clever artists, and, above all, original and stimulating conversationalists and the most delightful letter writers. They had a genius for expressing gracious thoughts and novel ideas in the most felicitous language. Madame du Châtelet died translating Newton's Philosophy, Mademoiselle Lespinasse discussed with d'Alembert the most abstruse mathematical problems, whilst Mademoiselle Voland maintained a lifelong correspondence on equal terms with Diderot, throughout which, in the strangest fashion, the ardent cheek of Love presses the frigid jowl of Philosophy. Madame de Pompadour herself, too, sought distraction from the fatigues and worries of her office in the pleasant ways of Art, and, under the guidance of the courtly Boucher, learned to wield the burin of the engraver with the utmost grace and skill. Other great ladies took courses in chemistry, physics, or natural history, after the example of that inquiring spirit the Duchesse de Chaulnes, of whom it was said that she was never satisfied until she knew of everything, first who hatched it and then who laid it. So many things passed through her head, it was unkindly affirmed, that nothing could remain in it long enough to reach her heart : frivolities obstructed the way to serious things.

Some women even attended the hospitals and found amusement in learning to wield the deadly weapons of the eighteenth-century surgeon. Madame de Genlis practised her skill on the unhappy peasantry who had the misfortune to live in the neighbourhood of her country seat. The abject misery of their condition is

well illustrated by the fact that when the lady offered thirty sous to all who would allow her to bleed them, they flocked to her improvised surgery in such numbers that she was soon obliged to withdraw her offer. "Mademoiselle Bihéron," says Bachaumont, "affords us one of the most curious and interesting spectacles. This girl, as active as she is industrious, has for several years applied herself with the greatest intelligence to the study of anatomy, and executes quite perfect anatomical models. She employs all kinds of materials for her purpose, and reproduces the various organs of the body with extraordinary vraisemblance. Works of this kind should be extremely useful in various surgical operations, and this clever woman ought to be encouraged by the Government."

These physiological investigations were, indeed, so much the fashion among women of Society that some practical jokers, by inserting an announcement in the *Journal des Savants*, actually persuaded the Comtesse de Voisenon that she had been unanimously elected President of the Royal College of Medicine.

The influence of women, in fact, was felt everywhere and in everything. "Behind each pretended great man," says M. Victor du Blé, "whether he be orator, poet, or captain, look close, and you will discover that this genius is nearly always only the voice, the arm, or the poetry of a woman who smiles in the shade."

Woman was the patron of letters and the fine arts, the arbitress of the elegancies, against whose decree there was no appeal. The fortune of the artist, the writer,

the philosopher, the dramatist who pleased her, was made. The picture, the drama, or the romance which she ridiculed was irretrievably damned. And, on the whole, she dealt out justice with an even hand. She made no more mistakes than were made at periods when man was the supreme judge of artistic achievement. In the eighteenth century her applause was the goal and the reward alike of poets, painters, and musicians. This is so, to a great extent even to-day, but the fact was never paraded so ostentatiously as in eighteenth-century France. When the high-born but indigent Abbé de Bernis (Voltaire's "Babet-la-Bouquetière"), at the beginning of his amazing career, sighed for a rich living, his very dear (the voice of scandal said, too dear) friend and cousin, the Princesse de Rohan, approached the Cardinal de Fleury on his behalf. The Princess was very eloquent, for the Abbé wanted the benefice very badly, but the Cardinal turned a deaf ear to her supplication and a blind eye to the shabby gentility of her protégé. "Monsieur l'Abbé de Bernis," said the obdurate Prelate, "your debaucheries have made you unworthy of the favours of the Church: so long as I am in office you will obtain nothing."

"Very well, Monseigneur; I will wait."

The retort was repeated and applauded everywhere. It reached the King's ears and amused him greatly. According to some memoirs of the time, it was Madame de Pompadour who said to Bernis:

"You will be the last man to whom I accord my favours."

And Bernis is made to reply:

"Very well, Madame; I will wait."

It is a pretty story, but it is probable that the first version is the true one, for Madame de Pompadour had her own very good reasons for being unable to speak to Bernis in the terms attributed to her.

Undoubtedly the reign of the Marquise was a golden time for the man of wit who could turn an elegant compliment. A pretty little abbé, writing pretty little verses for a pretty little lady, might easily be rewarded by a fat living, or, if he combined a facility of versification with diplomatic talents, he might climb, Heaven knows where! Bernis, for little more, won the Cardinal's hat:

> "On dirait que Son Éminence
> N'eût le chapeau de cardinal
> Que pour tirer sa révérence."

The man who described the Government as "an absolute monarchy tempered by epigrams" was not so very far wrong. Wit was the order of the day. Everybody had pretensions to it, and nobody in Society appears to have cared for anything else. Among the *émigrés* who sought refuge at Brussels during the Revolution was a certain Abbé, who had been nicknamed the Abbé Roulé, because he had sworn to wear his hair in a pigtail until the King had come into his own again. In his presence, Rivarol once severely criticised a certain measure taken by his fellow *émigrés*: "If they had only had a little *ésprit*," he said, "they would have avoided this blunder." "*Esprit! esprit!*" exclaimed the

Abbé, "it is *esprit* which has been our undoing!" "Then, Monsieur," retorted Rivarol, "how is it that you have not saved us?" But, although the Abbé had no reply to make, there was, nevertheless, a good deal of truth in what he said. When verbal dexterity comes to be held in such extraordinary esteem as it was held immediately before the Revolution, it becomes a very real danger; and for all its cleverness, Rivarol's retort did not do away with the objection brought forward by his opponent.

When bluff old Quentin de La Tour, who was something of a philosopher and very much concerned at the condition of the State, went to Versailles to paint his masterly pastel portrait of the King, he ventured to say:

"Il faut bien le dire, Sire, nous n'avons pas de marine."

Louis brought the artist back to his picture by the reply:

"N'avez-vous pas Vernet, Monsieur de La Tour?"

The snub may have been merited and was very gracefully administered, but the spirit of it is typical of the flippancy with which the gravest subjects were treated.

Such, in brief, was the state of affairs when Greuze returned to Paris. His was just the kind of art (in one branch of it at least) which might be expected to flourish in such a society, and, from the first, he seems never to have doubted of his ultimate success.

The artist had no sooner settled down in his new lodgings in the Rue du Petit Lion, in the Faubourg Saint Germain, than he set himself furiously to work in the hope of forgetting that "amiable and interesting Princess" who had made such havoc of his heart and of his time in Rome; and, having once made the plunge, it was not very long before he abandoned the heroic idea of dying of a broken heart. At his easel once more, and his name beginning to be known, he found life quite worth living. You see, Letitia was a long way off, so it was too late to change his mind again, and, then, he was very busy executing orders for pictures.

Among his first portraits were those of his patron, the Abbé Gougenot, and his brother, with the wife of the latter.

He also painted the masterly portrait of Étienne Jeaurat, who from this fact achieved an immortality to which his rather commonplace pictures of Parisian bourgeois life scarcely entitled him. The portrait is conceived in a large, broad way, and executed with the greatest spirit. It deserves to be considered one of the happiest pieces of portraiture which the eighteenth century has given us.

To this period also belongs his portrait of Fontenelle, who died shortly afterwards at ninety-nine years of age. The ancient philosopher was remarkably well preserved, a circumstance which he owed, possibly, to the iciness of his disposition. He was born at Rouen in February, 1657, and was the nephew, through his

mother, of Pierre and Thomas Corneille. "At the first sight," says Sainte-Beuve, "it seems a piece of irony on the part of Nature to have made him the nephew of the man who created those heroic souls of Polyeucte and the elder Horace, and so many other impetuous and sublime-hearted characters; for he was the coolest and most even soul, and the most devoid of any fire or passion that ever existed."

With startling candour, Fontenelle used to say:

"My father was a fool, but my mother was a woman of some intelligence: she was a Quietist and a gentle little woman; she often said to me: 'My son, you will be damned'; but that did not cause her any uneasiness."

With that calm and profound insight which distinguishes him above all other literary critics, Sainte-Beuve has indicated the points of resemblance between Fontenelle and his illustrious uncle. "With all his lofty qualities," he says, "the great Corneille had, I will not say, a great deal of cleverness, but a prodigious amount of ingenuity; when they are not passionate and majestic, and even then, when once they have launched their sublime word, his characters continue to argue, and they do so with subtlety and to excess; they speak from the head; the brain with them takes the place of the heart; they refine upon ideas and things, and extract their quintessence. Let us for a single moment make a supposition, take from the great Corneille all his warmth, all the inspiration of his heart, and ask yourselves what will be left of him with his dry and cool faculty for reasoning and making nice distinc-

tions. . . Now, in the case of Fontenelle," he proceeds, "the whole man was made up of these qualities of pure cleverness and ingenuity, without a remnant of warmth. In him the brain was everything." In effect, just as Nature, when she made the head of the immortal Tim Turpin, "forgot to dot his eyes," so by an equally reprehensible oversight, when engaged upon the frame of Fontenelle, she apparently forgot to give him a heart.

La Bruyère, an enemy, portrayed Fontenelle in his youth under the character of Cydias the Wit. The piece reads like a ferocious satire, and yet the portrait which Madame Geoffrin, a friend who passed her life with him and was the executrix of his will, drew of him in his old age is essentially that of the same person.

"He never laughed," she wrote; "I said to him one day: 'Monsieur de Fontenelle, have you never laughed?' 'No,' replied he, 'I have never uttered a ha! ha! ha!' That was his idea of laughing. He had never wept; he had never been angry; he had never run; and as he did nothing from sentiment, his impressions of things were never like those of others. He had never interrupted anybody; he would listen to the end without losing a word; he was not in a hurry to speak; and if you had accused him of anything, he would have listened all day without saying a word."

Fontenelle looked upon the human comedy with the amused detachment of some wise old god. "The man who wishes to be happy," he used to say, "reduces and restricts himself as far as he is able. He has these two characteristics: He seldom changes his place, and he takes

up little room!" Fontenelle wrote the *Pluralité des Mondes* for women, and he lived by their applause. But now he is perhaps chiefly remembered by the length of his life, the brevity of his style, and the venomous sting of his wit. Among his best sayings is that inspired by the beautiful Mademoiselle de Champmeslé's desertion of Racine in favour of Monsieur de Clermont-Tonnerre :

> " À la plus tendre amour elle fût destinée
> Qui prit *Racine* dans son cœur ;
> Mais, par un insigne malheur
> *Le Tonnerre* est venu qui l'a *déracinée*."

The epigram, it is true, has also been claimed for Quinault ; but it has all the characteristics of Fontenelle's style. There is less doubt about his famous couplet :

> " Sommes-nous trente-neuf on est à nos genoux,
> Mais sommes-nous quarante on se moque de nous."

It was Fontenelle's greatest ambition to become a member of the Academy. Five times he paid his visits, and his feminine friends put all the strings in motion on his behalf ; and five times Boileau and others whose enmity he had incurred, succeeded in getting his candidature rejected ; but, after the fifth rebuff, like the philosopher and wit that he was, he wrote a discourse on Patience, which he sent to the Academy, and this gained him the coveted place among the forty Immortals. It is said that, except when he went out to dine, he left his house only once during the whole course of his life, and that was when he was carried out to be buried.

The portrait of Fontenelle by Greuze scarcely perhaps

does justice to the frigid sentimentality of the man's character. It represents a very handsome, but not in the least good-natured old man. That probably was well enough ; but there is a suggestion of softness about the eyes which we do not readily associate with Fontenelle's character. It is not among the best of Greuze's portraits.

Greuze was represented at the Salon of 1757 by eight large pictures, not to mention a number of smaller ones. It was the artist's habit to describe his pictures at full length, with a wealth of detail ; the practice became a perfect mania with him, till at last each of his pictures went to its destination accompanied by a batch of manuscript setting forth his object in painting it and, above all, exhorting the spectator to be warned in time by the terrible example before him. He is not happy with his pen, but he enjoyed writing so much, and, after all, it did nobody any harm !

In Greuze's time, the Salon was held every other year, so that he did not miss an exhibition by his sojourn in Italy. Since 1699, the exhibition was held in the Grande Galerie of the Louvre, in the Salon Carré, known as the Salon, whence the exhibition took the name by which it has ever since been known. Admission was free and the price of the catalogue was twenty sols (tenpence). Until 1755, the money obtained from the sale of the catalogues was handed over to the *concierge*, but in that year Cochin, the great engraver, was instrumental in stopping this practice. When Chardin became treasurer,

the money derived from these sales, which sometimes realised as much as £500, went to defray the "most pressing expenses, such as the payment of the Academy models, who are not in a position to wait for their wages." Artists were allowed to send as many pictures as they pleased; and they were not subjected to the caprice of a Hanging Committee, for apparently no painting sent for exhibition was refused a place.

Perhaps the most ambitious of Greuze's pictures in the Salon the year following his return from Italy is that known as the *Neapolitan Gesture*, whatever that may mean, or, as he preferred to describe it: "A young Italian woman making the Neapolitan gesture, and thus sending away a Portuguese gentleman in disguise, who has been recognised by her waiting woman." This is certainly one of the best of Greuze's earlier works, and was painted, as we have seen, whilst the artist was attending the Academy schools in Rome. The figure of the young woman is finely drawn and her face has something of the charm of his later work. The other figures, however, are theatrical, and the picture as a whole looks more like a scene taken from a stage representation of the *Mariage de Figaro* than a transcript from real life. At the sale of the San Donato collection this picture fetched 53,000 francs.

There is more reality about the composition which he was pleased to entitle: "A Mother scolding a young man for upsetting a basket of eggs which the servant has just brought from market, whilst a child is trying to mend one of the broken eggs." In this picture the young

man listens to the reproaches of the old woman with the utmost indifference, whilst the girl, sitting with her hands on her lap, looks so sulky that the breaking of her eggs would appear to be the least of her grievances against him.

*La Paresseuse Italienne* represents a heavy and slatternly woman, displaying, in a wholly unattractive manner, the charms which it is the avowed object of dress to veil and to adorn. In this instance, such clothing as she has does neither. There is little good to say of the picture.

*L'Accordeur de Guitare* is much more pleasing and a better work in every way. It bears a close resemblance to Watteau's picture of the same subject.

These four pictures are specially interesting, as they show how very little Greuze was influenced by the Italian school of painting. His two years' sojourn in Rome had done nothing to impair the sturdy individuality of his style ; nor, on the other hand, does it appear to have taught him a great deal.

It was in this same year's Salon that Greuze exhibited his fine portrait of Pigalle, who, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, had befriended and encouraged him when he was an obscure and unpopular Academy student. Indeed, it was the great sculptor who had introduced the young artist to his friend, the Abbé Gougenot, and thus paved the way for Greuze's journey to Italy. Pigalle was a sympathetic character. He, too, had served a hard apprenticeship to adversity, and even when his fame was established by his magnificent *Mercury*, his poverty was so great that he had been compelled to labour for five years as an ordinary workman for a



sculptor, far less gifted but very much more fortunate than himself. His statue of the Virgin, however, for the Invalides brought him under the notice of the Comte d'Argenson, and later he became the favourite sculptor of Madame de Pompadour : from that time forward, he knew poverty no more.

Pigalle's masterpiece was the tomb of Marshal de Saxe which he executed for the Lutheran church at Strasburg. He had begun this great work in 1756, whilst Greuze was still under the spell of Letitia in Italy, and it was not completed until twenty years later. Pigalle was a sculptor of great originality, and when he was commissioned to make a marble statue of Voltaire, inexpressibly shocked his contemporaries by insisting on representing the aged and attenuated figure of the philosopher without even such covering as is afforded by a nightcap and a pair of slippers. His view was that nightcaps and slippers and all other forms of clothing are ephemeral ; that the elegant costume of to-day will in the near future appear ugly and ridiculous ; whilst the form of the nude human figure alone is eternal and universal. And who shall say that he was wrong ?

At the close of the Seven Years' War it was decided, on the suggestion of Madame de Pompadour, to erect a colossal equestrian statue of Louis XV in what is now the Place de la Concorde, apparently in the naïve hope of making the people forget the crushing defeats sustained by His Majesty's armies. The work was given to Bouchardon, but on his death, Pigalle was ordered to

complete the statue. This he did by ornamenting the pedestal at the four corners with allegorical figures representing Strength, Wisdom, Justice, and Peace. The statue was unveiled on June 20, 1763, in the presence of large crowds of people, who maintained a dead silence, though the *Gazette de France* of a week later stated that the ceremony was attended by "the enthusiastic acclamations of an innumerable company." Thus is history written. In the morning the statue was adorned with three sets of verses. The first, turning on the circumstance that the four figures at the corners of the pedestal have their backs to the spectator, although exceedingly funny, is too full of Gallic salt to bear repetition here. The second runs thus:

> Il est ici comme à Versailles;
> Toujours sans cœur et sans entrailles.

and the third:

> Grotesque monumen! infâme piédestal!
> Les Vertus sont à pied, le Vice est à cheval."

Old La Tour, the painter, relates that when he went to see the statue, he heard a market woman say to another, as she pointed to the figures decorating the pedestal: "See how the King has made them put his wantons by the side of his procuress! Look, there is Madame de Mailly, and there is Madame de Vintimille, and behind her is Madame de Châteauroux, and the one beside her is Madame de Pompadour!"

Greuze's portrait of Pigalle was a labour of love, and

the artist in his gratitude gave of his best. Besides this portrait, Greuze gave the great sculptor the original painting called *The Little Sister*, which was afterwards engraved by Chéreau, the prints being on sale at the engraver's establishment at the Deux Piliers d'Or, in the Rue Saint-Jacques.

## CHAPTER XI

### HOW MONSIEUR GREUZE, ON HIS RAMBLES IN OLD PARIS IN SEARCH OF MODELS, ENCOUNTERED THE FAIR BOOKSELLER IN SEARCH OF A HUSBAND.

GREUZE'S method of work was excellent: instead of allowing himself to become hypnotised, as it were, by the model he happened to have before him, he loved to wander about the streets of old Paris in search of inspiration and local colour. And where was he more likely to find them than in the quaint and picturesque scenes of everyday life in the capital under Louis XV? At that time the muddy, unclean, rank, insanitary, but, nevertheless, delightful old town existed almost intact as it had been in the days when the Armagnacs and the Burgundians fought out their bloody feud in its narrow, tortuous, and pungent streets. The worn and shining cobble stones of those ancient thoroughfares had rung under the heels of François Villon, Master of Arts of the University of Paris, student, poet, and housebreaker, and the thievish, blackguardly crew with whom his lot was thrown. Under those tottering roofs the disreputable genius, with his boon companions, René de Montigny, a scoundrel of noble birth, Colin de

Cayeux, a fellow with a pretty talent for picking locks, Thevenin Pensete, Gui Tabary and many another cut-throat, kept the night alive in passing round the bottle; and when Master François got tired of the vile company, he would withdraw himself and sing in marvellous verse of Blanche, Rose, Guillemette, and Fat Margot, or of little Macée d'Orléans, who corrupted him; of the haughty Cathérine de Vaucelles, who caused him to be whipped; or of the Belle Heaulmyère, whose bitter lament on the loss of her youth and beauty is one of the glories of French literature:

" Qu'est devenu ce front poly,
Ces cheveulx blonds, sourcilz voultyz,
Grant entr'œil, le regard joly,
Dont prenoye les plus subtilz ;
Ce beau nez droit, grant ne petiz ;
Ces petites joinctes oreilles.
Menton fourchu, cler vis traictis,
Et ces belles lèvres vermeilles ? "

The verses have been exquisitely rendered by Swinburne:

" Where is my faultless forehead's white,
The lifted eyebrows, soft gold hair,
Eyes wide apart and keen of sight,
With subtle skill in the amorous air ;
The straight nose, great nor small, but fair,
The small curved ears of shapeliest growth,
Chin dimpling, colour good to wear,
And sweet red splendid kissing mouth ? "

What a joy it was to the artist to watch the lively, swarming multitude of swaggering swordsmen, sandalled monks, mincing courtiers, prowling beggars, jolly market women, and frolicsome children, continually on the move,

clamouring, clattering and chattering their tumultuous way through streets so narrow that a man could in many cases step from the garret of one house to the attic of the house opposite! How he delighted to listen to the gossip of the women at the pump; and how good it was to see the plump, rosy-faced children, who seemed to thrive marvellously playing in the mud of the gutters!

Greuze felt at home with the people; he understood them and they understood him, for they felt that he was one of themselves. He used to go out every morning with the definite purpose of collecting notes for his pictures and to seek for models. "If he came across a head which pleased him," says Diderot, "he would willingly have fallen on his knees in the mud, if by so doing he could entice the bearer of that head into his studio." The painter, in these expeditions, went wherever his legs and the fancy of the moment carried him. Now it would be to the pleasant shade of the Place Dauphine, where he was often to be seen looking at the pictures in the open air exhibition and giving the young artists hints (for he was the most obliging of men), or listening to the chattering of the birds which he thought were almost as garrulous as the good Parisians themselves; then he would stroll about under the heavy columns of the Halles, among the fresh fish and the salted jests of the dames of the quarter, stopping every now and then to make a rapid sketch of a comely fish-wife or a stout-limbed urchin playing hide-and-seek round the stalls. He caught and noted a gesture here, an attitude there, a smile, a jeer; or sometimes a fragment of a conversation



casually overheard gave him an idea for a picture, as was the case with the work he entitled *The Stepmother*.

Another of his favourite haunts was the Palais Royal, which in his time was not absolutely public. According to the regulations posted up at the entrance, women in *manteaux de lit* or other déshabillé, men in dressing-gowns, vests or caps, and servants in livery were not admitted. From time to time two Swiss soldiers, posted at each of the gates, bawled out: "Li entrer pas en casaquin!"—"You can't come in in a jacket!"—and they ran after any one in an unconventional dress who managed to slip in, and, to the accompaniment of language as forcible as it was picturesque, unceremoniously pitched him out. These Swiss were under the command of two archers in jerkins, who were in the pay of the Duc d'Orléans. "They walk about continually," says the police officer Julie, "and see, or pretend to see, everything that goes on." As a matter of fact, what they saw could have been as nothing compared with what they did not see, for we have unimpeachable testimony that the most extraordinary things went on there unhindered. Now and then, however, one of the Swiss soldiers might be seen giving chase to a girl of the town with a whip, which he used unmercifully. But on the morrow, the girl would be in the garden again, as gay as you please, as though she had never had a whipping in her life.

"The Palais Royal," says Mercier in the *Tableau de Paris*, "is an enchanted region: a small, luxurious city, enclosed within a greater. It is the temple of voluptuous-

ness in which the dazzling vices have banished the very shadow of modesty. There is no place in the world where corruption bears itself with such graciousness as in the Gardens of the Palais Royal."

"The mother of a family," continues the same writer, "would not dare traverse this noisy promenade with her two young daughters; the honest woman would not dare appear in the midst of the courtesans, provocative by their lavish display of jewellery, their appearance, their behaviour, and often even by the licence of their words." Contemporary writers say that, compared with the Palais Royal, the Tuileries—itself none too strait-laced—was quite a sanctuary of virtue.

The young men about town, who were mainly responsible for this state of things, were called *Tartares*, and the wooden promenade which connected the two parallel wings of the main building, from the fact of its being their favourite walk, was known as the *Camp des Tartares*. The decoration was simple, consisting of ornamental porticoes made of painted canvas. The shops which bordered the famous wooden galleries formed a sort of perpetual fair. Any evening crowds of gay young men might be seen swaggering along, arm-in-arm, jingling the seals on their watch chains amid a perfect labyrinth of ribbons, laces, feminine ornaments, dresses, flowers, musk, and rouge boxes. These young bloods fooled and jested with the girls who went to meet them, also arm-in-arm. Until well past midnight, and especially after the Opera had disgorged its audience, the walks were crowded by multitudes of elegant people attracted

by the fresh air of the Gardens, the brilliant scene, or to hear the latest scandals of the Court and the town, and to listen to the recitation of new verses, which in a less free-and-easy society would also have been cause for scandal.

The people who frequented the Gardens between two and four o'clock in the afternoon were more decorous in their behaviour. During these hours the ladies of the other half of the world, worthy housewives, old soldiers, shop girls, clerks, idlers, financiers, actors and actresses passed to and fro in closely pressed ranks. The scene has been brilliantly portrayed by the spirited pencil of Augustin de Saint-Aubin and later by the scarcely less vivacious brush of Debucourt.

But, above all, Greuze, in these expeditions, loved to loiter on the Pont Neuf, which, as Mercier says, " was to the town what the heart is to the body ; the centre of life and circulation." The concourse of people was prodigious. At this time it was the greatest thoroughfare in Paris. " If you are searching for any one, native or foreigner," proceeds Mercier, with whom it is impossible to part company if you would know old Paris, " there is a moral certainty of your meeting with him here within the space of two hours at the outside. The police-runners are so convinced of this truth, that they habitually lurk here for their prey, and if, after a few days' look out, they do not find him, they conclude with a certainty nearly equal to evidence that the bird is flown."

Half-way across the bridge stood the famous fountain

or pump, called "La Samaritaine." This was a group of two life-sized figures in gilded bronze, representing Christ and the woman of Samaria, by the famous sculptor Germain Pilon, which stood under a pavilion, and on either side of a large gilt basin, into which flowed a stream of water conveyed through a reservoir to the Louvre. On the top of the pavilion was a sundial, surmounted by a clock with small gilt figures which struck the hours. The Governorship of the Samaritaine was one of the thousand sinecures in the gift of the Crown. It was the duty of this gentleman to see that the whole structure was kept bright and the mechanism in good working order. Needless to say, the duties of the office were performed by deputy, and the Governor lived in a sumptuous mansion hard by.

During the reign of Louis XV a large number of small shops had sprung up on the bridge, occupied by sellers of hot and cold drinks, second-hand booksellers, makers of nougat, omelettes, and apple fritters, boot polishers, quack doctors, peep-showmen, fortune tellers, and cheap jewellers. It was a perfect Babel, in which private citizens, soldiers, churchmen, countryfolk, courtiers and ragamuffins jostled and elbowed each other unceremoniously. On the grey stone parapets, all kinds of hawkers daily pitched their stalls, in the midst of peripatetic singers, dressed in feathers by way of emphasising the fact that they sang like birds; sellers of the latest scurrilous ballads; newsmongers known as *nouvellistes*, sellers of old hats and second-hand finery; vegetable and fruit merchants; vendors of ratsbane, who went about

with a row of dead rats hanging by the tail to a long pole balanced upon their shoulders, calling out in raucous voices: "Death to the rats! Death to the rats!"; then there were the shrill cries of the saucy girls who sold flowers in flat baskets:

"Jolis coquelicots, mesdames,
Jolis coquelicots nouveaux!"

A little further on their pleasant voices were drowned in a deafening clamour of hawkers with more vigorous lungs. "New brooms! New brooms!" "Lottery tickets! Lottery tickets! My tickets always win!" "Buy my rolling pins and wooden spoons!" cried another. "Rabbits' skins for sale!" "Sweep! Sweep your chimneys from top to bottom!" It was a regular pandemonium. Each side of the pavement and around the statue of Henri IV, who looked down on the gay scene from his bronze horse, with a benign and tolerant smile, were seated women and girls selling hot chestnuts, oranges, apples, and other fruits; whilst others, armed with a short knife, opened oysters with marvellous dexterity by a simple turn of the wrist. With the empty shells they built pyramids by the side of their stalls from six to twelve feet high. The Parisians of the day were gluttons for oysters. They could not have enough of them. "I have seen Crébillon the son," says Mercier, "eat in my presence a hundred dozen without bursting; he drank warm milk, whilst I swallowed champagne; he offered me his milk, and I handed him my bottle; we disputed warmly on digestion; but he was right and I was wrong—milk is the true solvent of oysters."

In another place a quack doctor, of gigantic stature, in flowing robes, mounted on a high brazen chariot, his head adorned with bright coloured feathers, shouted in a stentorian voice which might have been heard from shore to shore of the Seine, and was audible from one end of the bridge to the other in spite of the din raised by other practitioners. With the greatest confidence, he undertook to cure all ills, from the toothache to housemaid's knee. At all hours his ear was surrounded by invalids of all kinds. His clients had implicit faith in him, and like those of the doctor in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, would "sooner die from his remedies than be cured by those of another doctor, for whatever happened, with him you could rely upon everything being in order; and when you died under his treatment your heirs would have nothing with which to reproach you." That is always a consoling thought.

It was in Greuze's time that one of those Englishmen whose eccentric conduct has caused the unsophisticated foreigner to call us madmen, made a wager that he would walk the Pont Neuf for two hours offering for sale new crown pieces at a franc each, and that in this time he would not empty a bag, which he carried on his arm, containing twelve hundred francs in that coin. He set out on his experiment, crying aloud his wares. Many of those passing by looked at the coins, and continued on their way, shrugging their shoulders, and exclaiming: "They are bad ones!" Others, smiling disdainfully at so obvious a trick, did not even take the trouble to look at them. At last, a woman, after examining them for



a long time, bought three, which the Englishman let her have for twenty-four sols. After that, no more of the pieces were sold during the whole of the two hours, and so the Englishman's knowledge of human nature won him the wager.

These multifarious scenes and colours in the every-day life of all sorts and conditions of men who frequented the bridge were a constant source of delight to the eyes of the artist. It was here that he went as the most likely place to find models, besides the subjects, for his pictures. The originals of many of those charming heads of girls which were so soon to carry his name and fame over Europe, might have been seen daily presiding over an orange stall, or cajoling all comers into buying flowers on the Pont Neuf.

Passing over the bridge one day, he overheard a few words which gave him the idea for his picture *The Stepmother*. He himself relates the story in a letter to the *Journal de Paris*, dated April 13, 1781 :

" Will you permit me, Gentlemen, to furnish a historical note, by means of your journal, on the print which I am publishing on the 28th of this month, and which I have had engraved by M. le Vasseur. It is entitled *The Stepmother*. I had for a long time desired to paint this picture, but in each of the many preliminary sketches I made the stepmother's expression appeared to me unsatisfactory. One day, passing over the Pont Neuf, I saw two women speaking together with great vehemence ; one of them was weeping, and I heard her cry : ' What a stepmother ! She gives her bread, yes,

but she breaks her teeth with it!' As in a flash of lightning I saw my subject. I returned home and forthwith traced the plan of my picture. It consists of five figures: the stepmother, the daughter of the dead wife, the grandmother of the orphan, the daughter of the stepmother and a child of three years old. It is the dinner hour, and the unhappy child is about to sit down at the table with the others, when the stepmother takes a piece of bread and flings it in her face. I have endeavoured to paint at this moment the character of deliberate spitefulness which commonly results from a hatred of long standing. The young girl seeks to avoid it and seems to say: 'Why do you beat me? I have never done you harm.' Her expression is one of modesty and fear. Her grandmother is at the other end of the table; deeply grieved at what she sees, she raises her hands and her eyes to Heaven, and seems to murmur: 'Ah, my daughter, where art thou? What trouble! What bitterness!' The daughter of the stepmother, insensible to the fate of her sister, laughs at the despair of this worthy woman, and seeks her mother's approval as she makes game of her. The little child, whose heart is not yet corrupted, holds out his arms gratefully towards the sister who takes care of him. Lastly, I wished to paint a woman maltreating a child who does not belong to her, and by a double crime corrupts the heart of her own daughter."

One naturally looks with suspicion upon a picture which needs such a long explanation in more or less grammatical French. I will not say that the suspicion

is unjustified. Nor am I prepared to maintain that Greuze was always well inspired by what he saw and heard on the Pont Neuf. In this instance, the picture has the melodramatic touch which is usually evidence of friend Diderot having passed that way. He is largely responsible, as we shall see in a future chapter, for the spoiling of more than one of Greuze's pictures. He is one of those fellows with whom you cannot be angry; but one does wish that he had kept his moral and æsthetic principles for private use in his own tiresome comedies, and not forced his theories upon his artist friend.

When Greuze came to paint *The Father's Curse*, it was on the Pont Neuf that he found his model for the recruiting officer who, from the doorway, looks on with a sardonic smile, whilst the outraged parent, his face convulsed with anger, casts off his unnatural son who, after disgracing his family, has ended by enlisting.

The foot of the great bridge was at this time the regular haunt of gangs of crimps, who were pleasantly called "blood merchants." It was the business of these fellows to get men for the colonels, who sold them at a handsome profit to the King. They often persuaded youths by force to enlist, but without going to such lengths, they had a thousand devices for inducing young men to become soldiers. Each gang employed a company of pretty girls, and many a promising youth found himself a soldier of His Most Christian Majesty's armies, before he knew where he was. Then there were taverns into which the dupes were taken and made drunk; when

they became sober they found themselves in some unaccountable way in a dark room, under lock and key, whilst the nymph who had a few hours before delighted their eyes had, like Hans Breitmann's party, "All goned afay mit de lager beer—Afay in de Ewigkeit!"

"In this way," says the indignant Mercier, "an army of heroes is raised to uphold the honour and glory of the State. At the foot of the bridge, these heroes cost about thirty livres each, and rather more for specially fine fellows. Many an honest and industrious tradesman and his family have been made miserable by one or more of their children being deluded in this manner; and sometimes the parents repurchase at the rate of a hundred crowns the man who cost the Government ten—the money thus procured being divided between the Colonel and the recruiting officer.

"These crimps and recruiting officers," the same writer continues, "parade the streets, in dazzling uniforms, with elegant and martial steps, and address themselves to all the young men they meet, slapping them on the back, taking them by the arm and inviting them to have a drink in the most civil way imaginable. The bashful youth excuses himself, with a mixture of fear and shame, which has a singular effect on those who witness it for the first time." It had a singular effect on Greuze every time he witnessed it, and he made excellent use of this strong impression, for, in this shrieking melodrama called *The Father's Curse*, where all else is hysterics and falsetto, if we except the charming

little boy clinging with all his strength to his elder brother, the grim soldier standing at the door is the only figure "in key."

It was on the Pont Neuf again that Greuze came across the poor little fellow who gave him the idea and served him as the model for *The Education of a Young Savoyard*—one of those pathetic little exiles, scarcely out of babyhood, hundreds of whom were then, and still are, year by year driven from their homes by the abject poverty of their parents, to wander on foot through the capitals of Europe, each of them carrying on his poor little shoulders a consumptive marmot and a weird and decrepit instrument, half hand organ and half guitar. The mother in the picture, a fine, handsome woman, bends over her boy with a bright smile on her face, evidently trying to put a little heart into him as she teaches him how to finger the wheezy instrument which he holds on his bare knees. But the little man seems not to have such a thing as a laugh in him; he is thinking with bitterness of the approaching separation, and he is doing his best to swallow the tears in his throat. The artist has been touched by the pathos of this incident in the lives of the simple mountaineers of Savoy, with the result that the figures are natural and the emotion rings true.

On the Pont Neuf, again, the comely young woman whom he has painted as *The Seller of Hot Chestnuts* (one of the most natural and charming of his lesser known pictures) daily pitched her stall. If a man may judge by the look of her, as she hands out her wares to the little

ones attracted by the alluring smell of the roasting chestnuts, she had about as much aptitude for commerce as the delightful Miss Matty in *Cranford* at the time when she imagined she was earning her living by selling almond comfits to the children, throwing in one in every four "by way of make weight," and when remonstrated with always replied "The little things like it so much."

And lastly, it was in this same happy hunting ground that the artist found the girl who posed for *The Milkmaid*, one of the most finished of his works. It must have been delightful to be able to imagine that the morning's milk had been left by such a dainty little person. Milk was something like a drink in those days; but our great proprietary dairies have changed all that, and now milk has become a dull and fuddling beverage, almost on a level with what a distinguished Frenchman recently called our "triste ginger-beer." Some critics, however, cannot believe that this girl ever was a milkmaid. They maintain that she came to Greuze's studio straight from the boards of the Opéra Comique. "Look at this affable and roguish milkmaid," says M. Charles Normand, "leaning negligently on her horse's neck; it is in vain that she holds a little measure in her hand, she is not in the least like the good, fat, chubby-faced milk-women who bring our milk carefully diluted every morning. Her master, if she has one, would never dare send her to the stable to milk the cows, and in a little while we shall find her at Le Petit Trianon with Marie Antoinette, making a cheese, as the song



says, 'with the milk of her sheep.' That, in all conscience, is the only suitable place for such an aristocratic milkmaid." But there are milkmaids and milkmaids, and I dare say Greuze was ready to believe that this one was anything she said she was.

At about the time this picture was painted the sprightly Chevalier de Boufflers had just published his prose tale *La Reine de Golconde*, and all Paris was chattering of Aline, its milkmaid heroine, who began her interesting career by upsetting her milk-pail under romantic circumstances, which the author in the dedicatory verses thus summarises :

" Aline, auprès de son village,
Troqua, dans un vallon charmant,
Son innocence et son laitage
Contre un joli petit enfant.
Vous, en pareille circonstance,
Voici ce que vous auriez fait :
Vous auriez mangé votre lait,
Et conservé votre innocence."

There is little doubt, I think, that Greuze took advantage of the immense popularity of this charming story to paint the Aline of his imagination. Personally, I do not believe that the original of this picture came from the Opéra Comique ; nor, on the other hand, do I believe that she ever sold milk ; but I have a strong suspicion that she sold books, for, to my mind, she bears a striking resemblance to a certain fair bookseller of the Quai des Augustins, of whose face Monsieur Greuze had a lively recol-

lection, and with whom we are now to resume acquaintanceship.

This is how it happened. A few weeks after his return from Rome, Greuze was sauntering down the Rue Saint-Jacques—at that time the quarter of the engravers—looking at the prints in the shop windows, when, a little beyond the Chapelle Saint-Yves, before you reached the shops of Delalain and the Widow Duchesne, the booksellers, he came face to face with Anne Gabrielle. Do you remember the attitude of the girl in *The Surprise*? That is just how she looked when she came suddenly upon Monsieur Greuze in the Rue Saint-Jacques. There she stood, just as he remembered her before he went to Italy, and as Diderot had described her: "White and slender as a lily, red as a rose." * A beautiful girl, with a round smooth forehead, large innocent eyes beneath long shadowing lashes, a small provocative nose, a moist vivid mouth, and a complexion of milk and rose-leaves. A sentimental and coquettish air, says Greuze, redeemed her countenance from what would otherwise have been a somewhat sheepish expression. "I was smitten with admiration," says the artist; "she had a very beautiful face." † He followed her into her father's shop—the Babutis had recently removed to the Rue Saint-Jacques—in order to examine her face more at leisure, just as he had done in the days of the Quai des Augustins. He found she had the same air

* *Œuvres de Diderot: Salon de* 1764.

† *Greuze. Mémoire,* reprinted in the *Archives de l'Art Français.*



of perfect candour, the same grace, the same piquancy, the same vivacity which had charmed him in the days when he went into the poky little bookshop on the Quai des Augustins with friend Diderot and Rameau's Nephew, and sometimes without them. The only change he noticed was that her face was a trifle rounder, her carriage rather bolder, her figure perhaps a shade plumper, though he was not quite sure about that. The painter was compelled to admit that she pleased him mightily. On seeing him, she clapped her hands with joy and, running to him, took his hands and led him into her father's shop. Lord! how she talked! But what an agreeable voice she had! Her eyes shone with happiness, and the corners of her mouth were full of smiles. Monsieur Greuze felt that he could never tire of looking at her. Then she made him tell her all that had happened to him in Italy. That was not so easy, because of Letitia. But his shyness melted before her soft looks, and before he had finished she knew far more than he had told her—she was a clever girl. After a delightful hour spent with her, she made him tell her that he lived in furnished apartments at the Hôtel des Vignes, in the Rue du Petit Lion, in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, quite a short distance, in fact, from the Rue Saint-Jacques. "Then you will be able to come and see me often, Monsieur Greuze; that will be delightful," she said.*

And Monsieur Greuze went to see her often. He became quite a familiar figure in the Rue Saint-Jacques;

* *Greuze. Mémoire. Archives de l'Art Français.*

everybody knew him. And very soon everybody knew that he was on the best possible terms with the fair bookseller, for he had started painting some of those dainty heads of girls; and all these pictures in some strange way reminded people of Mademoiselle Anne Gabrielle Babuti.

"She employed," says Monsieur Greuze at a painful moment in after years, "every possible cajolery to get me to go and see her, and assured me that I had no need of pretexts, for she would always be delighted to see me." *

His memory must, surely, have played him false. In those happy days, I imagine, she needed very little art to persuade him to visit her. When a man is young, unattached, and succeeds in winning the favour of a beautiful and agreeable woman, he is not so coy. One almost suspects the painter of being not quite candid when, in after years, he looks back on these days, only to deny their sweetness.

A month passed in this soft dalliance, when one afternoon, the painter found Anne Gabrielle more animated than usual. She had taken great care over her toilet, her eyes were full of languor, her cheeks were flushed, she trembled with emotion. She smiled and sighed, and she managed to lay her hand accidentally in his, and allowed it to stay there. And Monsieur Greuze, being human, found her vastly interesting in her melting mood. Suddenly she raised his hand and pressed it to her burning mouth. He could see her heart

* *Greuze. Mémoire. Archives de l'Art Français.*

beating fiercely under the lace of her corsage; she had difficulty in breathing; her face was hot with shame; her hands clasped his convulsively; her voice trembled as she murmured:

"Monsieur Greuze, would you marry me if I were to consent to be your wife?"*

* *Greuze. Mémoire. Archives de l'Art Français.*

## CHAPTER XII

### IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN HOW MAN PROPOSES BUT WOMAN DISPOSES.

Now, Monsieur Greuze in those days had a lively terror of matrimony. So strong was this feeling that had he been superstitious he might have taken it for a premonition and been warned in time. He held that marriage was a very excellent state, but not for him. Although he was very sensible of the charms of domestic life, and had, indeed, often won applause for the skilful expression of those charms in his pictures, he himself preferred to contemplate them from the safe distance of an impecunious bachelorhood. That tempestuous fellow, Diderot, was always pestering him to get married, though what good had come to the philosopher through wedding his devout Mademoiselle Champion, who had the tongue of a Xantippe, the painter could not for the life of him see. And now there was Anne Gabrielle on the same tack. He did not like it at all. Marry, indeed! that was easily said! How could he afford to take a wife? He found it hard enough, as times went, to keep himself. Why could not these busybodies leave him alone, and let him get on with his work? He had

a name to make yet, and it would be soon enough to think about taking a wife when he had found his place at the top of the tree. In the meantime, he could not be bothered. A nice state of things, truly, if a man could not talk to a pretty girl, or even flirt with her in moderation, without her expecting him to marry her! It was too bad! So when he heard the sweet, trembling voice say:

"Monsieur Greuze, would you marry me if I were to consent to be your wife?" * he was frightened, taken completely off his guard; he did not know what answer to make. It was a case for diplomacy; he recognised that; but how to turn the girl's ideas into less dangerous channels, he did not know.

Anne Gabrielle still held his hand. That did not help him; on the contrary. In spite of his coyness towards the marriage question, the girl's emotion was fast communicating itself to him. Her fine eyes gleamed through a mist of tears. She was very much in love; and I dare say that the artist was not really so indifferent to her as, when describing the scene many years later, he would have us believe. He owns to being touched by her tears; he could not bear to see a woman cry; yet, at the same time, he did not want a wrong construction to be put upon his very natural solicitude for her. But he was really no match for a clever woman. His voice was not much steadier than her own when he replied:

"Mademoiselle, would not a man be only too happy

* *Greuze. Mémoire. Archives de l'Art Français.*

to pass his life with a woman as amiable as yourself ? " *

As he says, in looking back on the incident, he thought this answer conveyed his sentiments in a delicate though unmistakable manner. It did. But Anne Gabrielle was not the sort of woman to be put off by trifles. What he had said was enough for her.

With a passionate gesture, she threw her arms round his neck and pressed him to her heart. Her mouth sought his, and their lips met in one long kiss.

There was a noise of shuffling footsteps coming from the back-shop, and Monsieur Greuze had just time to tear himself from her arms, before Goodman Babuti—he " of the watery and bloodshot eyes " in Diderot's graphic phrase †—appeared in the doorway. The painter could scarcely have looked more foolish if he had been caught in the act of pocketing one of the bookseller's rare manuscripts. Without waiting to exchange compliments, he took to his heels. He scarcely knew what he did. His head swam with fear and with love. His heart was beating furiously. He still felt her firm bosom heaving against his chest in that close embrace, and the sweetness of her lips had entered into his blood. At the head of the street, he turned. She was standing on the threshold of the shop, the lace at her throat in disarray, her eyes sparkling, her cheeks in flame, breathless, and very beautiful. He never forgot the scene, and it was thus that he afterwards painted her

* *Archives de l'Art Français* (*Ibid.*).

† Diderot: *Salons. On the Portrait of Babuti.*



in *La Voluptueuse,* or *Throwing a Kiss*; he never painted a finer picture.

But he had hardly reached home when his mind was filled with misgiving. Till then his emotion and her passion had blinded him to everything else. But now he feared that his answer, especially in the light of what followed, had not been sufficiently explicit. Certainly he had gone farther than he had intended, and he could not make out how it had happened: he had a great deal to learn about women, and Anne Gabrielle was in every way well qualified to teach him. He began slowly to realise that. Then he wondered how much Babuti had seen, and that worried him too. He did not like the look of things at all. For the first time her conduct struck him as forward, to say the least of it. Why, the girl had literally thrown herself at him. She might have waited until he asked for her hand! She was too much in a hurry. He called it downright indecent! The hussy! Her artfulness aroused his indignation. He did not go to the bookseller's shop to make love to her, or at least not seriously; he went there for a little pleasant conversation, a little innocent amusement, and, above all, to regale himself, as an artist, with the sight of her beauty, thinking no evil, and seeing no danger. But what a magnificent model she would make! What a glorious creature she was, to be sure! He had never met a woman who came nearer to his ideal of beauty. If he were to make her his wife, what pictures he would be able to paint! But he could not afford to marry; so there was an end of it. Besides, he did not love

her ; or, at any rate, he did not think he loved her enough to marry her. Marriage was a serious thing, and demanded a great deal of serious thought. How the girl came to get such ideas into her head he could not imagine ! Then he asked himself why he had not put his foot down and refused to be drawn into the net which the sly minx had laid for him. Instead of that he had encouraged her ; or, at least, his own conduct had been scarcely calculated to discourage her. He was not pleased with himself at all. He could have kicked himself for his folly. It was the old story of Letitia over again. He blew hot and cold by turns ; he could not come to a decision and have done with it. This resolute young woman was, clearly, too much for him. She simply swept him off his legs. He was always weak with women, and weakness is the one fault of which a man cannot cure himself.

In the meantime, Anne Gabrielle had no intention of letting matters remain in the present unsatisfactory state. So, on the morrow, she went with her mother to Monsieur Strass, the jeweller on the Quai des Orfèvres, and ordered " a pair of ear-rings made of false diamonds ; and on the same day, she had nothing better to do than to put them in her ears." *

As she lived in a shop, the neighbours did not fail to compliment her upon them, and to ask who had given them to her ; and in a low voice, with downcast eyes, she said :

* *Archives de l'Art Français* (*Ibid.*).

" Monsieur Greuze has made me a present of them."

" Then, you are married ? "

" Ah, no ! " she replied, in a tone which seemed to imply " Yes." *

The first news the painter had of her little ruse was when his friends came to congratulate him. He told them that it was all a mistake, and that the state of his fortune would not permit of his marrying, even if he desired to do so.

Diderot, with his inseparable Rameau at his heels, came to welcome him into the joyous fraternity of Benedicks. Had he not always said that his friend ought to marry ? It was only right that an artist should have a handsome wife, and Mademoiselle Babuti, if he might be allowed to say so, was a fine woman, a very fine woman ; indeed, he had thought so all along ; in fact, at one time he had had aspirations in that quarter himself, but he had come to the conclusion that she would not have a lantern-jawed, out-at-elbows, head-over-heels fellow such as himself ; so he had paid his addresses to his landlady's daughter, who now gave him ample opportunity of exercising the philosophy he had painfully acquired as a hack-writer in a Parisian garret. Yes, he had always held that Anne Gabrielle was the most attractive girl on the south side of the river. He called the Nephew to witness.

" Humph ! " grunted that worthy, " the Babuti, ah yes ! I knew she would get one of you fellows ! Pooh ! women are all alike, crafty, wheedling creatures,

* *Archives de l'Art Français* (*Ibid.*).

and false to the core, and the most dangerous are those who hide their little game under an appearance of innocence. They were all right until you were fool enough to marry them, and then they became sly, quarrelsome, and altogether unbearable, like the wife of the philosopher, here ! "

" Steady on, Nephew ! " interrupted Diderot. " That is scarcely the way to congratulate a man in our friend's happy situation."

" Happy ! ha ! ha ! That's a good joke ! " shouted the Nephew. " He's going the right way about being happy ! Don't talk to me. I know women, I tell you ! Why, I who speak, I once had a wife, the liveliest and prettiest little thing imaginable. She was as courageous as a lion. She sang like a nightingale . . ." *

Diderot hastily interrupted him. They had heard all about Rameau's wife many a time before ; and if he were allowed to go on he would burst into tears, and go on weeping until they had taken him to drown his sorrows in the wine of the Café Laurent, at the corner of the Rue Dauphine.

As soon as he could get in a word, Monsieur Greuze protested that he had not the remotest idea of marrying Mademoiselle Babuti or anybody else. All he asked for was peace and quietness, so that he could get on with his work. How, in Heaven's name, did they expect him to paint whilst they were perpetually bothering him about this absurd story of his marriage.

" Bah ! " said the Nephew, wagging his head, as

* Diderot: *Neveu de Rameau.*



the painter led them to the door. "You do not know the Babuti. She has taken a fancy to you, and you can depend upon it, Mr. Painter, she will have you in spite of yourself! I know them, the jades!"

When Monsieur Greuze had undeceived everybody and had dismissed all his visitors, he locked himself in his studio, and sitting down at his easel, soon became absorbed in painting *Simplicity in the Character of a Young Girl*: * but, even here, in this dainty oval picture of a girl in widow's weeds, he caught himself unconsciously lending his model some faint resemblance to the voluptuous beauty who had so unceremoniously broken in upon the tranquillity of his life.

But, although his mind was involuntarily preoccupied with her image, in a way which almost amounted to obsession, he was determined not to go back to the Rue Saint-Jacques. He was too much disgusted by her trickery. Three days were spent in something very like sulking. During this time he heard nothing of her. Early and late he kept close to his easel. Even Anne Gabrielle, he reflected, could not marry him so long as he kept himself locked up in his studio. When he came to describe this passage of his life, in later years, he said, "I had already forgotten about her," † but that, surely, is an exaggeration. A man does not so easily forget a woman who has turned his life upside down as she had done his. At any rate, he had begun

* Exhibited in the Salon of 1761.
† *Archives de l'Art Francais* (*Ibid.*).

to think about her less and imagined that he had got rid of her.

But the Nephew was right: Greuze did not know the Babuti!

One fine morning, just after he had put the finishing touches to his *Simplicity* and had dismissed his model, he was standing before the picture admiring the subtle contrast between the demureness of the girl's face, gleaming out of the dark hood, and the coquetry of the arrangement of the ribbons on her breast, when there was a loud knock at the door. As he had forbidden his landlady to admit any one, he did not trouble to answer. The knocking continued, peal after peal. From a window he saw that it was Anne Gabrielle—he had feared as much!—in all her finery, accompanied by her mother's little maid-servant. There is a picture of his called *A Girl Listening at a Door*: that is how Anne Gabrielle looked on that eventful morning when she stood there listening at his door. He kept perfectly still in the hope that she would think he was out and get tired of waiting. Decidedly, he had a great deal to learn about Anne Gabrielle! She had cajoled the landlady into admitting that he was in; and she was determined to see him.

But he refused to open the door, for since her last escapade, he did not trust her in the least. Moreover, he eyed with the greatest suspicion that absurd notion she had got into her head of wanting to marry him. At his delay in opening to her "she redoubled her blows on the door, with hands and feet, like a veritable



fury." * She made a fearful racket. If she continued she would rouse the whole house and everybody would see her. The neighbours would talk, and women were so uncharitable in their judgments of each other! Besides, they would be sure to say it was his fault. He could hear her crying now. Poor girl! How she must love him, he thought, to risk her reputation in this way. His heart was filled with fear for himself and with pity for her. He could not possibly let her stay there, and so give occasion for malicious talk. There would be a scandal, and he could not face that. He opened the door. She burst into the room like a hurricane in petticoats; she was all in tears, and pale as he had never before seen her.

"I know it is very wrong of me, Monsieur Greuze," she sobbed, "but it is love which has led me astray. It was only my affection for you which caused me to resort to such a stratagem. You would forgive me if only you knew how I love you! My life is in your hands!" †

She flung herself at his feet, clasped her arms about his knees, kissed his hands and bathed them in her tears. She declared that she would not leave the room until he had promised to marry her.

"Oh!" she cried, in a voice choked by sobs, "I have compromised myself, and it was for your dear sake! What shall I do? What shall I do?"

Her hair had come down, and fell in sunny ringlets over her shoulders. How was it possible to resist a girl

* *Archives de l'Art Français* (*Ibid.*). † *Ibid.*

who looked so ravishingly beautiful in her sorrow? The reader may judge for himself by the picture in the Wallace Gallery called *Grief*. That is how she looked, except for a liberty which the artist took in the drapery of her shoulders; but I do not suppose that in this particular his imagination played him false.

Monsieur Greuze was bewildered, but at the same time deeply affected, by her grief. He would have liked to help her, if only he had known how to go about it. But, so far from being able to tell her what she should do, he had not the faintest idea of what he himself ought to do in the present emergency. On the one hand, he could not let her stay indefinitely in his studio, for he really wished the girl well and would not for the world have brought shame upon her. On the other hand, she had said that she would not leave him until he had promised to marry her; and she looked as though she meant it. As far as he could see, there was only one way out of the difficulty. So he took it.

"I had pity on her," he says ungallantly, "and promised her everything that she desired." *

When he had made this concession to the importunate maiden, the dialogue was continued amid kisses and tears and tears and kisses; and Monsieur Greuze gave as good as he received, for he had not the same objection to kissing that he had to marrying. But, after all, he reflected, she was a dear, sweet girl, and evidently loved him to distraction, and that is a form of flattery which even a misogynist might find it hard

* *Archives de l'Art Français* (*Ibid.*).

GRIEF

(Wallace Collection, London)

*Photo by Messrs. W. A. Mansell & Co., London*



to resist. We have every reason to suppose that our artist was free from that form of lunacy. Before the morning was over, Greuze had forgotten all about her trickery over the ear-rings, and indeed, only recalled the incident many years later when engaged upon the lugubrious task of drawing up a catalogue of the shortcomings of the woman whom he had once passionately loved.

The sight of Anne Gabrielle's tears had given the artist an idea for another picture. He set her on the model's platform, and seizing a new canvas, his paint-box, his palette and his brush, he rapidly sketched her whilst her eyes were still moist.

When the sketch was finished, the pair went arm-in-arm, in full sight of the chattering shopkeepers and their wives, to the Rue Saint-Jacques, to get the blessing of Goodman Babuti and of Anne Marie Réal, his wife. Now, Anne Gabrielle's father was an excellent fellow in his way, but he had a strong objection to parting with money ; so at first he received the artist's proposal to marry his daughter with a great deal of caution. But when he had assured himself that Monsieur Greuze did not press for—and, indeed, did not even mention—a dowry, he gave his consent to the marriage with the utmost readiness. On these terms, he congratulated himself on getting Anne Gabrielle off his hands, for, although she undoubtedly attracted a great many young fellows to his shop, he found that so long as they were good-looking and amusing she thought about anything rather than selling his books ; moreover, she had

a pretty taste in dress, which made her an expensive girl to keep. These facts caused him to form a very high opinion of the artist's talents. The husband of his other daughter, Monsieur Camerara, a general officer in the King's Army, had not been nearly so reasonable. He, therefore, welcomed Monsieur Greuze into his family with the utmost cordiality. As for Jacques Christophe, his son, who was destined to take Anne Gabrielle's place at the counter, he expressed his satisfaction at the acquisition of such a good-looking brother-in-law, by sundry winks and nudges, which Monsieur Greuze found very embarrassing.

It was not, however, until two years later that Anne Gabrielle succeeded in persuading her timid lover to lead her to the altar. It may well be that poverty was the chief reason for this delay, as at this time he seems to have been completely reconciled to his fate, and the fair bookseller had the satisfaction of knowing that her love was fully returned. "What is the end of marriage?" he asks in a lyrical outburst at the foot of a sketch of two boats, representing happy and unhappy married life, and he has no hesitation in answering his own question: "Two human beings uniting to shelter each other from the ills of life. . . I suppose that life is a river. . . " Certainly, Anne Gabrielle had played her cards well!

They were married quietly, not at the Church of Saint Yves as they ought to have been, seeing that this was the parish to which the bride belonged, but at

Saint Médard, " for fear of the pleasantries which might have been made at her expense, since she had told everybody that she was already married," * explains her husband when he had lost all his illusions and in his folly sought to tear from his heart the golden image of the wife of his youth.

So, having once made the plunge, Monsieur Greuze found that marriage was not such a very dreadful ordeal after all ; and he reflected with joy on the fact that he would have the handsomest model in Paris all to himself. In those days he was very proud of her.

" On the day following my wedding," he says, " I had just thirty-six livres (about thirty shillings) on which to begin housekeeping." †

But that did not worry him in the least.

* *Archives de l'Art Francais* (*Ibid.*).
† *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER XIII

### OF MONSIEUR GREUZE AND HIS GOOD FRIEND JEAN GEORGES WILLE, THE KING'S ENGRAVER.

ANNE GABRIELLE having made up his mind for him on the matrimonial question, Greuze threw himself with redoubled energy into his work. He felt that he had lately wasted far too much time, first in his vain efforts to escape from a determined husband-hunter and then in the delights of making love to his charming captor.

In the Salon of 1759 he was represented by no less than sixteen pictures, besides two sketches in Chinese ink. Among these was the *Simplicity*, to which allusion was made in the previous chapter. The *Feuille Nécessaire* for 1759, gives an interesting note on the subject of this picture :

" M. Greuze," it says, " has just finished making, in a manner which proves the resourcefulness of this painter's art, a copy of his picture *La Simplicité*, exhibited at the Palace of the Louvre and belonging to Mme ***. The picture having very much pleased a lady of the Court (Mme de Pompadour) to whom the arts owe too much for anything to be refused her, the lady who owned the work immediately said that since she admired the picture so much it should be hers. The

painter, wishing to indemnify Mme *** for a sacrifice so very flattering to him, went to the same model whose naïve countenance so well expresses the character of simplicity, and has composed a picture in which he has surpassed himself. In this copy he has made use of a different background, which brings his model's features into fuller relief, and has here corrected one or two slight faults which had crept into the former composition." *

Other pictures exhibited the same year were *La Dévideuse* (*The Wool Winder*), now in the possession of Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan ; *La Tricoteuse endormie* ; the portrait of Mlle Amici, the operatic singer, represented in the dress of one of her characters, in a draped and beribboned corset, with patches on her face, and her hair encircled by a red ribbon ; three heads which the artist had presented to his old friend and benefactor Sylvestre, and two others, of which the German Wille, one of the King's engravers, was the proud possessor.

Jean Georges Wille was born in the Bieberthal, near Königsberg, on November 5, 1715. Having shown considerable aptitude for engraving and being unable to earn his living by that art in his native land, he determined to migrate to France. In the eighteenth century, Paris was the Mecca of the indigent German artist, just as in our day London has the melancholy distinction of being that of the impecunious German musician. The year 1740 saw the unfortunate Wille

* *See La Revue Universelle des Arts*, 1863.

wandering about the streets of the French capital and meeting with several piquant adventures, in his search for cheap lodgings. He at length took up his quarters in a house in the Rue de l'Observance.

"Wishing to learn something of the people among whom I was to live," he says, "I went downstairs to my host's room, where I happened to meet a very affable young man, who, during our conversation, informed me that he was seeking to become a good man of letters, and, if it were possible, a still better philosopher. He added that he would be delighted to make my acquaintance, the more so because he had a great esteem for artists and loved the arts. He thought we must be of about the same age, and, moreover, knew already that we were to be neighbours. I thereupon gave him my hand, and from that moment we were fast friends. This young man was M. Diderot, who has since become so celebrated. He occupied the floor immediately below my rooms, where he possessed a very pretty library and was pleased to lend me any books which I thought would be useful to me." *

It was through Diderot that Wille made the acquaintance of Greuze, and a lifelong friendship, eminently profitable to both parties, sprang up between the vain, sensitive, and very touchy painter and the stolid, harsh-featured, but warm-hearted German craftsman.

Wille never tired of singing the praises of his "good friend Monsieur Greuze," and he probably did more

* Wille (J. G.) *Mémoires et Journal, Publiés par G. Duplessis*: 2 *vols.*, 1857.

JEAN GEORGES WILLE

(From an Engraving by J. G. Müller)


Jean George Wille,
Graveur du Roi, de leurs M.tés Impériales
et Royale, et de Sa M.té le Roi de Dan-
nemarck, des Académies de Paris, Vienne
Rouen, Ausbourg et Dresden.

than anybody else to spread his fame over Europe. He bought his pictures, engraved them himself, or caused others to engrave them; bored everybody he met (and he met a great many influential people) by his perpetual bragging about Greuze, and pushed his friend's fortune in every possible way. His enthusiasm knew no bounds. You should see with what jealousy he defends his treasures against the covetousness of the rich amateurs!

"M. Greuze," he says in his Journal under the date June 11, 1759, "has just painted for me and delivered a head which is truly admirable. He has represented a girl looking up in the air, with her hair done in a picturesque manner. She has round her neck a white kerchief striped with red." The good fellow wrote French with a heavy hand, and the language here proved too much for him, so he continued in German:

"I have had some difficulty with M. le Comte de Vence on the subject of this head. He wished to have it, if need be by force; but after the exchange of several spirited letters, the affair terminated satisfactorily, for I am to keep this divine head. It cost me 144 livres." *

The engraver is quite infatuated with these beautiful girls' heads which fell so easily from his friend's brush; he esteems them among the choicest morsels of contemporary art, as indeed they are.

"M. Greuze," he says on July 17, 1760, "has delivered to me a woman's bust, life size, admirably well painted in every part. This head is almost in profile and of a majestic look and carriage. The hair falls

* Wille (J. G.) *Ibid.*

negligently towards the two shoulders and is tied at the back of the head with a red ribbon. The corset is red and the sleeves are yellow; a kind of muslin collar, striped with red and folded cross-wise over the breast, forms her clothing. I am enchanted with this piece of work.

"Twelve days previously, my friend M. Greuze had delivered to me a very graceful and even voluptuous head of a young woman with her hair turned up in curls at the sides. Her corselet is of blue, and a kerchief of a violet colour negligently covers her bosom. These two pieces, very boldly and perfectly executed, form a pair." *

It was Wille who introduced Greuze to the German market, and the many distinguished persons who came to him for their portraits were forthwith taken off to his friend's studio. Thus, when the Graf von Moltke came to Paris with his friend, Herr Hellfried, Wille did not fail to introduce them to Greuze, and persuaded the former to buy on the spot "two superb heads representing two girls," for which he paid forty louis d'or. In short, he rendered the artist a thousand friendly services which the latter from time to time repaid with a little masterpiece; as on November 27, 1759:

"That profound and solid painter, M. Greuze, being my true friend, has made me a present of an excellent drawing by his own hand. This picture represents a cook leaning against a cupboard and reading, or reckoning up her account book, on her return from market, to

* Wille (J. G.) *Ibid.*



see if by any means she can deceive her mistress. The drawing is beautifully and boldly executed in black crayon and white chalk on grey paper." *

On another occasion Greuze, who was the most generous of men and could never do enough for his friends, inexpressibly delighted the good German by dedicating to him a little portfolio containing six drawings of heads. The inscription on the portfolio is in these terms :

" Heads of different characters dedicated to J. G. Wille, Engraver in Ordinary to the King, by his friend, J. B. Greuze, Painter in Ordinary to the King, and on sale at Paris, at the house of J. B. Greuze, in the Rue de la Sorbonne, the first gateway to the left on entering by the Rue des Mathurins, 1766." † The designs were engraved by P. C. Ingouf.

Another compliment which Greuze paid the engraver was by consenting to receive his son Pierre Alexandre into his studio as a pupil. This was in April 1761, whilst Greuze was still engaged on *The Village Bride*, and Wille was so sensible of the benefit that in the January following we find this entry in his Journal :

" I sent my son Pierre Alexandre Wille to the house of M. Greuze, his master, with a silver coffee-pot, which he presented to Madame Greuze as a New Year's gift. He was very well received, as was only right." ‡

Towards the end of the next month, Greuze went to see the engraver and noticed on his table a beautifully bound set of a hundred fine prints of portraits by Van-

* *Ibid.* † Wille (J. G.) *Journal*, February 21, 1766.
‡ *Ibid.*, January 1, 1762.

dyck. "As I remarked that they gave him great pleasure," says Wille, "I made him a present of them, which," he naïvely adds, "gave him still more pleasure."*

The friends delighted to walk through the picture galleries together eagerly discussing the works of the great masters. One day they went to the Rubens gallery in the Luxembourg, and persuaded the keeper to open it for their special benefit. The guardians of the royal art treasures were in those happy days more indulgent than they are at present. The friends passed the whole afternoon perched on the top of a pair of steps, "in order to look close into the pictures of this great man, and we carefully studied his manner of painting and colouring his works and many other particulars worthy of remark." †

But the great day in Wille's calendar was November 19, 1763. Greuze had invited him to come early in the morning to take chocolate with Anne Gabrielle and himself. The engraver had put on his best velvet coat for the occasion, and his excellent wife Louise had seen to it that his shirt frill and his ruffles were spotlessly clean, for she was one of those good housewives, after Chardin's own heart, whose mental horizon is limited to a natural aptitude for ministering to the bodily comfort of their husband and children. When he had drunk the chocolate which Anne Gabrielle had poured out for him, he was preparing to take his leave,

* Wille (J. G.) *Journal*, February 21, 1762.
† *Ibid.*, July 22, 1760.

when, to his great surprise, Greuze begged him to sit down before his easel, and straightway began to paint his portrait. "The first sketch," says Wille, "was done at one sitting; it is admirable and worthy of a Rubens or a Vandyck. I dined at my friend's house, after which he set to work again and continued as long as the light lasted. I am very much flattered by my old friend's action." *

Greuze worked at the portrait with such expedition that on December 10 Wille is able to write:

"I went with my servant Joseph to fetch my portrait which my friend M. Greuze has done in a manner as perfect as it is generous, and as my wife and the whole household did not know that he had painted me, I showed it to them suddenly and took them completely by surprise; it made a great impression on everybody. All were very much surprised and pleased to the highest degree. My son Frederick, according to his custom, jumped for joy, and cried out: 'Ah, that is my papa! That is my papa!' And my eldest son coming back in the evening from the Convent of the Chartreux, where he is copying some pictures by Lesueur, stood before the portrait for a whole hour. Indeed, my portrait is certainly the best thing that this great painter has so far done. Towards the evening of the same day I returned to the house of M. Greuze and presented to Madame Greuze a silver dish with a cover (which had cost me two hundred livres) as a slight recognition (it was thus I put it) of the trouble she had had in assisting

* Wille (J. G.) *Journal*, November 19, 1763.

in the transfer of the canvas of my portrait to a new frame. She was very much flattered at my procedure, and said a thousand obliging things to me in accepting the gift,—after making the customary difficulties. My friend Greuze was not in at the time, but he came to see us on the morrow and scolded us, as he said, for the expense to which we had gone on account of the present I had given to Madame Greuze. He said that he would avenge himself; that he had painted my portrait out of pure friendship for me; at this moment he embraced me, and I thanked him again as much for this sentiment as for his work, perfect in every point and very flattering to me." *

Wille was right. Greuze's portrait of his friend is undoubtedly one of the very best things he ever did.

"This portrait," says Diderot, criticising it when it hung in the Salon, "is very fine indeed. Wille's blunt and harsh look, his stiff bearing, his little, ardent, and bewildered eyes, his blotched and pimpled cheeks—all are rendered to the life. How well it is composed! How beautifully it is drawn! How fine is the touch! What verity and variety of tone! Just look at the painting of the velvet, the shirt frill, the ruffles! I should be pleased to see this portrait by the side of a Rubens, a Rembrandt, or a Vandyck. I should be pleased to see how much our painter would lose or gain by the juxtaposition. When we have seen this Wille, we turn our backs on all the other portraits, even on those of Greuze." †

* Wille (J. G.) *Journal* December 10, 1763.

† Diderot, *Salon*, 1765. *On the Portrait of Wille, the Engraver.*

The number of people who visited the Salon in the year 1765, when Wille's portrait was exhibited, far surpassed all previous records ; and during the whole period of the exhibition this picture attracted a vast amount of attention.

Mâthon de la Cour, who during the Revolution died on the scaffold after a dramatic trial at Lyons, in his *Letters to Monsieur *** on the Paintings, Works of Sculpture and Engravings exhibited at the Salon of the Louvre in* 1765,* says :

" The portraits of M. Wille and of M. Caffieri are painted in a most spirited manner, as, indeed, artists ought always to be painted."

* Mâthon de la Cour, *Letters*, p. 57.

## CHAPTER XIV

### OF LOVE, ART, AND THE VILLAGE BRIDE.

MUCH to his surprise, Monsieur Greuze took very kindly to the married state, and at once settled down to a life of happiness with his beautiful Anne Gabrielle. When you cannot have what you love, it is sound philosophy to learn to love what you have ; and that is precisely what our artist did. There would be far less unhappiness in the world if others did likewise !

In those days he did not approve of bachelors at all. " They are no better than poachers ! " he would exclaim indignantly. If he could have had his way he would tax every man Jack of them into marriage. They were shirkers who ought not to be tolerated in any well regulated state. He waxed exceeding wrath whenever any of his friends expressed in his presence a determination to remain celibate.* As for him, he had come to love his wife with an ardour which must have fulfilled her fondest dreams. Certainly at that time they were as pretty and devoted a couple as anyone could wish to meet. And soon the studio rang with the voices of three golden-haired babies, who

* Valori (Mme C. de) in biographical notice prefixed to *Greuze, ou l'Accordée de Village.*

THE VILLAGE BRIDE (p. 179)

(Louvre, Paris)

*Photo by Messrs. W. A. Mansell & Co., London*



gave every promise of becoming as good-looking as their parents.

You should have seen how proud this husband and wife were of each other as they walked out arm-in-arm from their lodgings in the Rue de la Sorbonne, or from those in the Rue Pavée (the first door to the right coming from the Rue Saint-André des Arts) into which, as being more commodious, they shortly after moved! They often went to call on their neighbour the excellent Wille, who lived at number 29, Quai des Augustins, near the Hôtel d'Auvergne, between the Rue Pavée and the Rue Gît-le-Cœur, and took him with them on their excursions into the country, when the party often included Frago and Doyen, or other artist friends.

"M. Greuze," says Wille in his Journal on September 19, 1763, "came to see me very early in the morning to propose that I should accompany him with Mme Greuze and M. Doyen, the painter, to Champigny, to see their child who is out at nurse. I consented the more willingly that he is my particular friend, and, as we had a very good hired carriage, we were able to be back at about six o'clock in the evening." *

We can only imagine that they took Doyen with them out of charity, for at this time he was madly in love with Mademoiselle Hus, of the Théâtre Français, and even threatened suicide if she continued unkind.† A man who carries things to such lengths is a nuisance to himself and to everybody else. It was Doyen who

* Wille (J. G.) *Mémoires* (*Ibid.*).

† *See* Bachaumont. *Mémoires.*

told the story of how Fragonard's dainty picture *The Swing* (one of the gems of the Wallace Gallery) came to be painted. One day a courtier, the Baron de St. Julien, sent for him to meet him at the house of his mistress, in order to take his orders for a picture. The Baron wanted Doyen to do a portrait of his mistress on a swing and to paint himself, her lover, in the position of the gentleman in Fragonard's picture. Doyen was very much shocked and indignantly refused, but referred the Baron to Fragonard.* He was wise, for, though an excellent painter in his way, his hand was too heavy to carry off such a subject. With the light brush of Frago, it was different. He could skate over very thin ice with impunity, and I imagine that, with a little good will, nobody can be really shocked at Frago's gay masterpiece.

In the year following this excursion into the country, there is talk of another baby in the Greuze household, and on May 15 Wille writes :

"My wife held at the baptismal font a little girl to whom Mme Greuze has just given birth. I went to the Eglise Saint-Benoît with my son Frederick. The child was named Louise Gabrielle, after the name of my wife and that of Mme Greuze, wife of the celebrated painter of that name." †

So Greuze was celebrated ; but he was still very poor, and the shining gold pieces which Wille from time to time paid for the pictures of girls' heads which took

* *See* Collé, *Journal et Mémoires* (1748–1772).
† *See* Wille (J. G.) *Journal.*

his fancy, helped the artist over the first years of his married life.

Whilst Greuze was at work on *The Village Bride,* his fellow artists flocked to his studio to see the picture, which was famous long before it was completed. And Monsieur Greuze would harangue them on the domestic virtues, and Monsieur Diderot, who had done his best to inspire him with these sentiments, would be sure to be there, and would applaud him heartily.

When the painter had put the finishing touches to his portrait of Anne Gabrielle as the heroine and that of himself as the hero, he stood back from his easel and, with his brush still in his hand, turned with flashing eyes to the young artists around him.

"Well," he said laughing, "what do you say to that? Just look at it! That is what you can call painting: real painting, I mean. It carries you away with it. No trickery, no compromise, no weakness there! Life, my friends, that's what it is, life! Look at that girl's throat, it palpitates; you can see love lurking in those eyes; that mouth is athirst for kisses; that skin is stretched over real bones and the flesh quivers underneath! But you have to be a Greuze to handle your brush like that!" *

Talk of this kind did the artist a great deal of harm with some people, but all sensible persons made allowances for his peculiarities, the more readily in that scarcely a day passed without their receiving evidence of the fine qualities of his mind and heart.

* *See* Diderot. *Salons. Also* Métra *Correspondance secrète.*

"If you were to throw cold water on Greuze's head," says Diderot, "you might perhaps extinguish his talent with his vanity." *

And d'Alembert, when some one remarked, in his presence, on the artist's foible, replied:

"It is true, Greuze promises a great deal; but then he keeps his word."

The young men who happened to be present during these outbursts always listened respectfully, for, in spite of this childish egotism, Greuze was really the most disinterested and good-natured of men. They knew that, if at any time even the humblest of them was in difficulty, he could come to Greuze and be sure of receiving the readiest, the kindest sympathy and help.

"How many times," says Madame de Valori, "have I seen Greuze abandon his work in order to comply with the wishes of the young painters who came to ask his advice or to beg him to leave his home to come and give his opinion of their works: the sacrifice of his time was nothing to him, if he could be of service to any one." †

There exists an autograph note in evidence of Greuze's kindly interest in the work of his fellow artists who sought his advice. It is addressed to Ducreux, a young artist from Nancy who afterwards became a portrait painter of some distinction; and is quoted by the de Goncourts as being a very frank statement of his own methods of work:

"Let your works be as highly finished as you can

* Diderot. *Neveu de Rameau.* † Valori (Mme C. de) *Ibid.*



make them; go over them thirty times, if necessary. For your depths try to lay your colours on thick from the first, and do not be afraid to go over them again with semi-transparent colours if you want to modify the effect; never put your colours on thick when you are painting laces or gauzes; *be piquant if you cannot be true*; never make your heads larger than life size, nor under, if you can help it. To train your memory make plenty of studies, above all, of landscapes which will teach you harmony. Undertake only such things as you feel in your innermost conscience that you can do, and make haste slowly. Try, if possible, to build up and to graduate your shadows, above all, as regards the great masses.

"Make studies, especially in drawing, before you start painting." *

Greuze was still engaged in finishing his *Village Bride* at the opening of the Salon of 1761, and the picture was on exhibition for only the last six days. Its success was prodigious. No picture had ever before met with such a reception. The public went almost mad with enthusiasm. Even the theatres took up the cry, and the success of the *Noces d'Arlequin* which was played the same year at the Théâtre Italien was assured by the interpolation of a scene representing Greuze's picture.†

The public shut their eyes to the crudity of the colouring, the discords of tone, the blemishes of gradation, the garish lighting, the hundred and one technical

* Goncourt (E. et J.) *L'Art du XVIII^e Siècle.* Greuze.
† Desboulmiers. *Histoire du Théâtre Italien,* Vol. VII.

defects which might have been discerned in the masterpiece. They were fascinated and touched by the genuine emotion which had obviously inspired and guided the artist's brush. "Great thoughts," says Vauvenargues, "come from the heart." It is a fine thought finely expressed, and has the advantage over most aphorisms in that it is wholly true. The ultimate test of art is there, and the vitality of a book, a picture, or a piece of music depends on how much of his heart the artist has put into his work. And so Greuze, in spite of his glaring faults and his radical incapacity for perceiving more than a small portion of the calm joys which go to make the charm of married life, when, as a young husband, he painted the *Village Bride* contrived to give a stronger and more enduring expression of those joys than almost any artist either before or since. That is the secret of its immense popularity from the day it hung in the Salon to the present time. Go to the Louvre any day of the week and at any time you will always find a group of admiring spectators, belonging to all ranks of society, before this picture.

*The Village Bride* is remarkable in another way; for it inspired Diderot with the first of those articles by which he founded the modern school of art criticism. Listen to him:

"At last I have seen this picture by our friend Greuze; but it was not without trouble, for it continues to draw the crowd. It represents a *Father who has just paid over his Daughter's Marriage Portion.* It is a pathetic subject, and in looking at it one feels a soft

emotion stealing over one. The composition seemed to me very fine ; you feel that it really happened like that.

" There are twelve figures, each one in his right place and each doing the right thing. How well they are linked together ! . . .

" To the right is a village notary seated before a little table, with his back to the spectator. On the table are the marriage contract and other papers. Between the legs of the notary stands the youngest child of the house. Then following the composition from right to left, an elder girl leans on the back of her father's chair. The father is seated in the family armchair. Before him stands his son-in-law, holding in his left hand the bag containing the marriage portion. The bride is also standing, with one arm passed softly under that of her lover, her other arm being clasped by her mother, who is seated below. Between the mother and the bride stands a younger sister, leaning on the latter with one arm thrown round her shoulders. Behind this group, a young child raises himself on tiptoe to see what is going on. Below the mother in the foreground is seated a young girl with her apron full of little pieces of bread. At the extreme left, in the background are two servants closely watching the proceedings. To the right is a scrupulously clean pantry containing everything we expect a pantry to contain. In the middle of the wall at the back hangs an old gun. A wooden staircase leads to the story above. In the foreground occupying the space left empty of figures near the mother's feet, a hen leads her brood, and the little girl throws

bread to them. One of the chicks standing on the rim of an earthenware pan, with his beak in the air and his neck outstretched to let the water trickle down his throat, is trying his wings. . . . Such is the general design. Now for the details.

"The notary is clothed in black, with coloured breeches and stockings. He wears a great coat, a scarf round his neck, and a three-cornered hat on his head. He looks rather a sly, pettifogging sort of a fellow, as becomes a peasant of his profession: it is a fine figure. He listens to what the father is saying to his son-in-law. The father is the only person who speaks. The others listen in silence.

"The child between the notary's legs is excellent both as regards colour and action. Not being interested in what is going on, he looks at the papers covered with scrawl and passes his little hands over them.

"One sees that the elder sister, who is leaning against the back of her father's chair, is bursting with jealousy because her younger sister has found a husband before her. Her head is resting on one of her hands, and she casts angry and discontented looks on the betrothed lovers.

"The father is an old man of sixty, with grey hair, a scarf twisted round his neck; he has a good-natured look which pleases. With his arms stretched out towards his son-in-law, he speaks to him out of the fullness of his heart—it is very touching—he seems to say: "Jeannette is sweet and good; she will make

you happy. See to it that you make her so" ; or some other words on the duties and responsibilities of marriage. Whatever he says, it is assuredly touching and honest. One of his hands, of which you see the back, is tanned and brown ; the other, of which you see the palm, is white : that is true to nature.

"The lover has a most agreeable countenance. His face is tanned, but you see that he has a fair skin : he is a little inclined towards his father-in-law, and is very attentive to his discourse. He seems to be very much impressed. He is finely made and admirably dressed, though quite in keeping with his station in life. I can say as much for all the other figures.

"The painter has given to the fiancée a charming face, modest and reserved ; she is most becomingly dressed. That white linen apron could not possibly be better. There is a touch of luxury in her toilet ; but then it is her wedding day! You should see how realistic are the folds in the clothing of all the figures. This charming girl is not standing upright ; there is a slight and soft inflection of her whole figure and of all her limbs, full of grace and truth. She is truly pretty, and very pretty. She has a beautifully shaped bosom, which you do not see at all, but I will warrant that it is firm and needs no support. Had she bent more towards her lover she would not have been sufficiently modest ; had she inclined more towards her mother or towards her father, she would have been unnatural. Her arm is half passed through that of her future husband, and the tips of her fingers rest softly on his hand ;

that is the only mark of tenderness she gives him, and perhaps without being aware of it herself. It is a delicate idea on the part of the painter.

" The mother is a good peasant of close upon sixty, but hale and hearty. She also is becomingly dressed. With one hand she holds her daughter's arm above the elbow and with the other presses it just above the wrist. She is seated ; she looks her daughter over from head to heel. She is certainly sorry to part with her ; but it is a good match. Jean is an excellent fellow, honest and hard-working ; she has no doubt that her daughter will be happy with him. Cheerfulness and tenderness are blended in the physiognomy of this good mother.

" As for the younger sister standing by the side of the betrothed girl, embracing her and mourning on her breast, she is in every way a most interesting little person. She is truly sorry to part with her sister, and is crying at the thought of it ; but this incident does not sadden the composition, on the contrary, it makes the picture more touching. To have imagined this episode shows taste, and good taste. . .

" And that hen which has led her chicks into the middle of the picture and has five or six little ones, like the mother at whose feet she seeks food for her brood, and that little girl who throws bread to them and feeds them : all this, it must be admitted, is charmingly in keeping with the scene in progress, and with the place and the figures.

" It is the father who chiefly attracts the spectator's

eyes ; then the husband or fiancé ; then the bride, the mother, the younger sister, or the elder, according to the character of the person looking at the picture ; then the notary, the other children, the servants and the background and accessories. Clear proof of the soundness of the composition.

" Teniers painted manners perhaps more true to life. You would perhaps be more likely to come across that painter's scenes and characters ; but there is more elegance, more grace, a more agreeable nature in Greuze. His peasants are neither gross like those of our good Fleming, nor unreal like those of Boucher. I hold that Teniers is very much superior to Greuze as a colourist. I believe that he has a far wider range : he is, moreover, a great landscapist, a great painter of trees, of forests, water, mountains, cottages and animals.

" One might reproach Greuze with having repeated the same head in three different pictures. The head of the *Father paying the Marriage Portion* is that of the *Father reading the Bible,* and I believe also that of the *Paralytic.* Or, at any rate, they are three brothers with a great family likeness.

" Another defect. That elder sister ; is she really a sister or a servant ? If she is a servant, what business has she to be leaning on the back of her master's chair ? Nor do I understand why she so violently envies the lot of her mistress. If, on the other hand, she is a member of the family, why that ignoble look ? why that air of neglect ? Contented or discontented, she ought to have been becomingly dressed for her sister's betrothal. I

notice that those who look at the picture know not what to make of this figure, most of them take her for a servant, whilst the rest are hopelessly puzzled. I am not sure that the head of this elder sister is not a repetition of that of the *Blanchisseuse*.

"A woman of wit has suggested that this picture is composed of two natures. She thinks that the father, the lover, and the notary are certainly peasants, real country folk; but that the mother, the bride, and all the other figures belong to the markets of Paris. The mother is a buxom fruit seller or a fishwife; the daughter is a pretty flowergirl. The observation is at any rate ingenious; see, my friend, whether you think it just.

"But it is much better to ignore these trifles, and to give oneself up to the enjoyment of a piece which is full of beauties in every part; it is certainly the best thing that Greuze has done. The picture does him honour both as a painter skilled in his art, and as a clever and tasteful man. In the choice of his subjects he shows both sensibility and good morals." *

The picture was still the talk of the salons, the art world, the virtuosi, of all educated Paris, in short, when it was taken from the Louvre to be added to the collection of M. de Marigny. On his death, it passed into the possession of M. de Menars, and at his sale in 1782, was purchased for the King at a cost of 16,650 livres, and has ever since formed one of the most popular pictures in the Louvre.

* Diderot. *Salon*, 1761.

It may here be mentioned that about this time Greuze painted the picture called *Friendship* or *The Sisters*, for which there is reason to believe that Anne Gabrielle and her sister Madame Camerara served him as models.

## CHAPTER XV

### HOW MONSIEUR DIDEROT FLATTERED HIS FRIEND MONSIEUR GREUZE AND TEMPTED HIM.

The success of *The Village Bride* and Diderot's loud-mouthed approval of his friend's practical application of his own doctrines confirmed Greuze in his taste for depicting the manners and customs, and the homely pathos of the common people, with a strong, a very strong, moral flavouring. It was all Diderot's fault. There was no resisting that terrible eloquence of his. How was it possible for a young and impressionable artist not to feel flattered when the great Diderot openly hailed him as a painter after his own heart? More, the philosopher sought him out everywhere and drummed his doctrines into the painter's ears until he came to believe that they had always been his own private opinions. It must be owned that the pair had a great deal in common, and especially shared an inclination, as Greuze confessed, to be piquant when they did not choose to be severe. Diderot, for his part, carried his piquancy to a point beyond a joke, as in certain pages of *Jacques le Fataliste* and the uniformly stupid and indecent *Bijoux Indiscrets*, of which, to be sure, the author had the grace to be



heartily ashamed. Greuze never went so far as that. He is never really dull except at the times when he is in deadly earnest; and even then he is a moralist with a passion for lovely shoulders, a preacher who delights to point his moral and adorn his sermon by a generous display of the physical charms of his heroines. When he gives rein to his fancy he does not cease to be interesting. His wantons are never gross; on the contrary, they are only too alluring.

The philosopher would pounce upon the artist, seize him by the arm, and immediately begin to preach at him. It was impossible not to be moved by the fire of his discourses, and it would have taken a far stronger head than Greuze's to resist them. Then who among his contemporaries could praise his work as Diderot could? And Monsieur Greuze was fond of praise.

"This is your painter and mine," says Diderot, "the first among us to think of enlisting Art in the service of Morality, and of linking together events in such a way that it would be easy to make a story of them. He is rather vain, our painter, but his vanity is that of a child; he is intoxicated with his own talent. Take from him that naïveté which causes him to say of his own work: 'Just look at that! How fine it is!' and you will rob him of his animation, you will put out the fire and extinguish his genius. I very much fear that the moment he becomes modest he will have every reason to be so. Our qualities, at least certain of them, are closely allied to our faults. Most good women are of a peevish temper (Diderot was here evidently thinking of

his own good woman, who was pious and a shrew, so we will allow the statement to pass without argument); and most great artists have a crack in the upper story. Nearly all gay women are generous (here he is on firmer ground; his knowledge of the type was wide and peculiar); and the pious, even the genuine ones, are not averse to scandal-mongering. It is difficult for a master who feels that he is doing good to avoid becoming rather a despot. Whose faults should we excuse if not those of great men? I hate all those little meannesses which are the sign of an abject soul; but I do not hate great crimes, firstly, because fine pictures and fine tragedies are made of them; and, secondly, because sublime actions and great crimes carry with them the same character of energy. If a man were not capable of setting fire to a town, another man would not be capable of throwing himself into the flames in order to save it. If the soul of Cæsar had not been possible, neither would that of Cato. Man is born a citizen, now of Tenarus, now of Olympus; he is Castor and Pollux, a hero and a scoundrel, Marcus Aurelius, Borgia.

"We have three clever painters, fecund and studious observers of Nature. They are La Grenée, Greuze and Vernet. The second carries his brush everywhere, into the resorts of the people, the churches, the markets, the public walks, private houses, into the streets and the byways of the city; by day and by night, without ceasing, he gathers together notes of actions, passions, characters, expressions." *

* Diderot. *Salon*, 1761.

GIRL WASHING LINEN (p. 186)

(From an Engraving)

*Photo by Morelli*



Now Diderot had a world-wide reputation, and was recognised as one of the keenest intellects in Europe. Moreover, he always said what he meant. So when he assured Greuze that he was a great painter, the latter found no difficulty in entirely agreeing with him.

Under the stimulus of his friend's sympathy and praise, Greuze threw himself heart and soul into the production of pictures in which the moral purpose became ever more emphatic. He turned out these shrieking canvases with appalling rapidity. *The Death of a Father of a Family, regretted by his children; The Death of an unnatural Father, abandoned by his children; A Paralytic tended by his family, or The Fruit of a good Education; The Destroyed Will, or A Lesson to Parents*— these subjects threw Diderot into transports of enthusiasm.

"Courage, my good Greuze," he cries, "paint good morals. What, has not the pencil been long enough, and too long, consecrated to debauchery and vice? Ought we not to be delighted to see it at last unite with dramatic poetry in instructing us, in correcting us, in inviting us to virtue?" *

So Greuze listened to the voice of the tempter and became more and more melodramatic. Even that was not enough; he took to writing discourses on his pictures, and, like the man who spoils a joke in retailing it and then laboriously explains its point, he became a bore.

In order to give a lesson to fathers who fondly

* Diderot. *Salons. Œuvres.* Vol. X., p. 208.

imagine that their children deserve an entire confidence, Greuze painted *The Destroyed Will.* This is his description of the picture :

" A father of a family, who possessed a considerable fortune, had two children, his son and his daughter-in-law. This father, having reached the age when men lose their illusions and look soberly upon the future, made his will ; but such was his blind confidence in his son that he neglected to take it to a notary.

" A little while after, this father fell ill ; and his illness resulted in such a profound lethargy that his children mistook it for death. Their first care was to send the servants away and to take advantage of the middle of the night in order to purloin their father's will ! What criminal avarice ! The son, with a pale face and dry eyes, bearing a light in his hand, stepped silently into the worthy old man's room, accompanied by his wife, and, trembling, raised his parricidal hand against the sacred repository of his father's wishes. But—dreadful moment !—the father saw the light, he observed his guilty son in silence. Unhappy father ! What a tribunal ! Under that funeral pall, without knowing it, thou art going to precipitate thy son into the tomb whither he thought thou hadst already descended.

" The daughter-in-law stood behind her husband's chair. When he had read the will, the latter tore it into fragments, crying : ' It no longer exists ! ' The old man, his eyes flashing with anger and contempt, thereupon threw himself upon his son, saying : ' Stop, unhappy wretch ! Respect the last wishes of thy

father!' Thunderstruck by this reproach, the guilty young man expired, with the fragments of the will in his hand, whilst his distracted wife supported him in her arms. . . ." And, as the cracked gentleman in *Nicholas Nickleby* so often and so justly remarked: "All was gas and gaiters!"

Certainly Diderot's influence on Greuze is scarcely a matter for congratulation. Painting is not a suitable medium for preaching. The result is that, with a few exceptions, Greuze's pictures in this style aim at the sublime and achieve the ridiculous. But to Diderot these dreadful canvases were masterpieces. When he expressed his disapproval of his favourite painter, which he occasionally did in the most vigorous terms, it was for very different reasons; but his critical genius expressed itself most readily in appreciation, and that, after all, is the only kind of criticism which is of use either to the public or the artist. To identify criticism with the power of detecting faults is a common fallacy, though, rightly considered, fault-finding is really no part of the functions of criticism. A person of the meanest intelligence, if he have a twist that way—and he usually has—can find fault with any work of art, however fine it may be; but it requires a person of a far higher type of mind to appreciate the beauties of that work and state his reasons for admiring it. You will never get the best that a man has to give by picking holes in his work; that only disheartens and irritates him. Intelligent appreciation is the only fruitful kind of criticism; whilst the most effective way of dealing

with bad art is not to talk and write about it, but to ignore it. It was one of Diderot's greatest merits as a critic that he had this generous talent in a rare degree, and he is never so happy as when drawing attention to beauties in the works before him which would otherwise have escaped attention.

"Oh, what a dull, wretched business is that of criticism!" he exclaims. "How difficult it is to produce even a middling work of art, and how easy it is to feel its mediocrity!"

In this passage he seems to have remembered a pleasant remonstrance which the good Chardin once addressed to Grimm and himself when they were severely criticising some of the exhibits at the Salon:

"Gently, good sirs, gently. Pick out the very worst of the pictures here, and know that two thousand unhappy wretches have bitten their brushes in two with their teeth, in despair of ever doing even so badly. Parocel, whom you call a dauber, and who for that matter is a dauber if you compare him with Vernet, this Parocel is a man of exceptional talent relatively to the multitude of those who have flung up the career in which they started with him. Lemoine used to say that it required thirty years of practice before he learned to carry out his conceptions, and Lemoine was no fool. If you will listen to me you will perhaps learn to be indulgent. At seven or eight years of age they set us to draw from the copy, eyes, mouths, noses, ears, then feet and hands. When we have had our backs for a long time bent over the portfolio, they set us before the

ESPIÈGLERIE (p. 196)

(Wallace Collection, London)

*Photo by Messrs. W. A. Mansell & Co., London*



Hercules or the Torso ; and you have never witnessed the tears which this Satyr, this Gladiator, this Venus of Medici, this Anthea, have caused to flow ! You may take my word for it that these masterpieces of Greek artists would no longer excite the jealousy of our masters if these works had been delivered over to the mercy of the pupils. After having spent days and nights in drawing still life, we are set to draw from life, and suddenly the work of all those years seems to be annihilated ; one is as awkward as when one held a pencil for the first time. Then you must teach your eye to look at Nature ; and how many have never seen Nature and never will see it ! Such is the torture of our lives. When we have been kept for five or six years before the model, we are delivered over to our genius, if we happen to have any. Talent is not discovered in a moment ! It is not at the first attempt that one has the heart to admit one's incapacity. Many precious years have passed before the day comes when one is filled with disgust, lassitude, and ennui. The pupil without vocation is from nineteen to twenty years of age when the palette falls from his hands, and he is then without means of earning his living, and is often without morals, for it is not easy for a young man to have nude models continually under his eyes and remain sage. What can he do ? What is to become of him ? He is compelled to take up some subaltern position of which the doors are open to misery, or die of hunger. Most of them take the first course ; and, with the exception of the score or so who come here every other year to exhibit, the

others, unknown and perhaps less unhappy, have donned a breast-plate or shouldered a musket, or gone on the stage. What I am telling you is the life story of Belcour, Lekain, and Brizard, bad actors in despair of becoming middling painters." *

In criticism the beginning of wisdom is to cultivate a spirit of detachment which will enable us to consider the good qualities of a work of art without making it a matter of reproach to the artist that there are other qualities which his work does not possess. That was a lesson which, thanks to Chardin's protest, Diderot had thoroughly mastered; and that is largely why his critical work is a living force even to-day.

Fortunately, Greuze still found time to paint those exquisite pictures of children and young girls on which his fame to-day chiefly rests: *The Girl with the Doves*, *Fidelity*, *Espièglerie*, *Ariadne*, *The Broken Mirror*, and the ever delightful *Listening Girl*, which charm the eyes of every visitor to the Wallace Gallery, were all painted by way of relaxation whilst the artist was engaged on his big canvases; and Diderot was just as pleased with the former as with the latter. The picture which specially delighted him, as it has delighted many another, from the day that it hung in the Salon until now, when it attracts all visitors to the National Gallery of Edinburgh, was *The Child Weeping over her Dead Canary*.

"The pretty elegy!" he exclaims, "the charming

* Quoted by E. and J. de Goncourt in *L'Art du XVIII^e Siècle*. Chardin.

GIRL WITH A DEAD CANARY

(National Gallery, Edinburgh)

*Photo by Messrs. Annan*



poem! What a lovely idyll Gessner would have made of it!" and so on, until in his enthusiasm he writes a story around the girl and imagines what he would say to console her. He succeeds entirely to his own satisfaction, and leaves her smiling through her tears. But, with characteristic scepticism, he refuses to believe that the death of the bird is the real cause of the heroine's grief. The subject of this little poem, he says, is so delicate that many people have missed the point of it. He notes the fact that Greuze had already painted the same subject in his picture of the buxom girl in white satin, wringing her hands over a broken mirror (now in the Wallace Gallery). "How stupid it would be," he exclaims indignantly, "to attribute the sorrow of the one girl to the death of a bird and the melancholy of the other to the breaking of a mirror! That girl is weeping for something else, I tell you."

When the Marquis de Marigny, with a number of fine gentlemen in his train who were also patrons of the Arts, visited the Salon of 1765, he praised some pictures, disparaged others, but found little that really interested him in the exhibition until he came upon Greuze's *Girl Weeping over her Dead Canary.* He was enchanted with it and turning to the artist, said:

"That is very beautiful."

"Monsieur," answered Greuze, "I know it. In fact, I get a good deal of praise, but I am in want of work."

"That, my good Greuze," replied Vernet, "is because you have a great many enemies, and among them

is one who, though he seems to love you to distraction, will be your undoing."

"And who is that?"

"You yourself," answered the great seascape painter. "Yes, my friend, you have many unpardonable faults which stand in your way. You imagine that it is enough to have genius, the greatest talents, a proud and sensitive soul, to paint beautiful pictures, in order to make your fortune; whereas you must have supple knee-joints and seek by dint of meannesses to make others pardon you your genius for painting beautiful pictures. Then they will give you apartments at the Louvre, a pension, perhaps the Order of Saint Michel; your masterpieces will no longer wound the vanity of your *confrères*, and the whole *Académie de Peinture* will acclaim you as a great painter from the moment when you have ceased to be one." *

Vernet was undoubtedly right. He had set his finger upon one of the greatest difficulties which obstruct the path of art. There is always plenty of room at the top, but before he can reach the heights the artist has to break through the banded hosts of mediocrity who bar the way, and very few succeed in doing so.

It is probable that the high opinion which Greuze entertained of his own talents did him no harm, for the world has a way of taking a man at his own valuation, and we can forgive a great deal of egotism to him who is as generous as Greuze was in his appreciation of the work of other artists. The kind of vanity with

* Mme C. de Valori. *Ibid.*

which Greuze has been so often and so bitterly reproached is usually only the sign of an expansive and affectionate nature, and, so far from being a very serious is a rather endearing fault, as the broad-minded Diderot, a thorough man of the world, fully recognised.

But what undoubtedly did interfere with the painter's prospects was the occasional rudeness of his tongue. With sitters whom he found unsympathetic he could be downright boorish. The Dauphin, for instance, was so pleased with his portrait which Greuze had painted for the Salon of 1761, that he invited the artist to paint that of the Dauphine. Greuze attended the Court to comply with the invitation, but when he was presented to the Princess, he was ill-mannered enough to say that he "did not know how to paint that kind of head." The appearance of the Princess may have been ridiculous, but such an answer passes beyond all the bounds of decency. The extraordinary thing is not that he lacked commissions for portraits, but rather that, with such an uncouth tongue, he ever came to be a successful Court painter. It was probably owing to this circumstance that apartments at the Louvre were not granted to our artist until 1769, an honour which he might reasonably have expected several years earlier.

## CHAPTER XVI

### OF MONSIEUR GREUZE AND HIS FAVOURITE MODEL.

"THIS painter is certainly in love with his wife, and he has every reason to be," wrote Diderot when criticising Greuze's portrait of Anne Gabrielle, exhibited in the Salon of 1765. The critic was right. Greuze was full of her. She had completely turned his head. The couple might hereafter hate, vilify, and fly from each other's society, but the painter, try as he might, would never succeed in freeing his art from the impress of her beauty; and, if he had but known it, it was a good thing for him, for her, and for us that it was so. In these gracious canvases, in which, under different subjects, we can still trace some resemblance to the features of the beloved, he betrayed the heart of a faithful lover, just as in those equally charming pictures of plump, happy, golden or flaxen-haired little ones, he betrayed the heart of a devoted father. Who has ever painted such delightful children as Greuze has done in the *Gâteau des Rois, The Beloved Mother, The Girl holding an Apple,* the *Paix du Ménage, The Spoilt Child, The Little Girl in her Shift,* and a dozen other dainty pictures and studies such as the red chalk drawing, here reproduced, for which one of his own baby girls sat as model?

THE VESTAL (p. 201)

(MONTPELLIER MUSEUM)

*Photo by Messrs. W. A. Mansell & Co., London*



What artist has ever so frankly, so intimately delineated his Muse's charms as he has done in those portraits of Anne Gabrielle, entitled *Philosophy Asleep, The Beloved Mother, The Benefactress, Mme Greuze as a Vestal*?

"What! that a Vestal!" cried Diderot, the irrepressible, when seeing the last-named picture at the Salon. "My good Greuze, you are making game of us!"

The critic knew too much about the model to accept her, in the character which the artist had for the occasion given her, without winking and putting his tongue in his cheek. The fiction was too palpable to a man who had played ride-a-cock-horse with the model's children upon his knees. Moreover, the philosopher had seen too many other pictures for which he knew that Anne Gabrielle had sat as model, wherein she looked anything but a Vestal. Really, friend Greuze could not have it both ways!

In the picture which the painter entitled *La Philosophie endormie,* for instance, Anne Gabrielle is represented as overcome by sleep, and it was a dream of something far removed from philosophy which caused that enigmatical smile to lurk in the corners of her charming mouth. I dare say Jean Baptiste could have told you what it was had he chosen to do so. The face of Voltaire's "divine Émilie" must have worn precisely the same expression when she fell asleep over her philosophy, which was Newton's, and dreamed of the absent Saint-Lambert in one of that frigid lover's rare moments of tenderness. Anne Gabrielle is half-seated, half-lying in a *bergère,* with her head thrown

back, slightly to one side, on the cushion which hangs over the back of her chair. Her plaited hair is covered with a close-fitting linen cap trimmed with fine lace. A bodice with buttons down the front, such as our mothers and sisters wore in the 'eighties, covers and supports her bosom without concealing its shapeliness, and is unbuttoned at the point where the base of the throat rises from a fichu of foaming lace. One arm rests on an open book, upon a table supporting a globe and a row of other books at her side; the other falls languorously the whole length of her body to her knee. A King Charles spaniel, an irascible-looking little beast, keeps watch in her lap. She has let her embroidery-frame and her bobbin slip from her hands to the floor by the side of her crossed feet, in dainty high-heeled slippers. Sleep possesses her whole person and relaxes her limbs under the déshabillé of her dress, the very lines and folds of which seem to have taken on the soft abandonment of the sleeper. Her eyes are closed, her nostrils gently palpitate, and her breath escapes softly from her quivering mouth. Certainly, Anne Gabrielle's philosophy was soundly asleep on this occasion, nor can that of her husband be described as particularly wide-awake when he had the temerity to deliver up his wife in such an attitude to the eyes of the curious.

In criticising some of Greuze's portraits of Anne Gabrielle, Diderot is very candid.

Of *The Beloved Mother* he says:

"Do you see this beautiful fishwife with her generously

HEAD OF A CHILD

(From a Chalk Drawing in the British Museum)

proportioned form and her head thrown back? The paleness of her face, the disorder of her head-dress, the mingled expression of pain and pleasure on her countenance betray a feeling which is sweeter to experience than seemly to paint. Very well, that is the preliminary study of *The Beloved Mother*. How is it that here a character is decent, whilst there it ceases to be so? Can it be that we must have accessories and surroundings before we can form a just opinion of physiognomies? Is it that without this help they remain indecisive? It must certainly be something of this sort. That half-opened mouth, those swimming eyes, that attitude of abandonment, that full throat, that voluptuous combination of pain and pleasure make all honest women blush and lower their eyes at this place in the Salon. And yet, in the finished picture by its side, we have the same attitude, the same eyes, the same throat, the same combination of passions, and not one of these ladies sees anything in it to offend her modesty. For the rest, if the women pass this study quickly by, the men remain long before it; I mean those who know what's what in Art and those who, while they pretend to know, really come to enjoy a very voluptuous picture, and those who, like myself, combine the two motives. There are almost incredible gradations of tone in the forehead, and from the forehead to the cheeks, and from the cheeks towards the throat. This is the sort of thing which teaches you how to look at nature, and, indeed, recalls nature itself. But you must see the details of that full throat for yourself,

it is of no use my trying to describe them. It is altogether beautiful and masterly in its fidelity to nature. You have never in your life seen two contrary expressions so skilfully characterised in a face. Rubens himself has not done better in the Luxembourg picture in which he has painted the look of pleasure on the Queen's face at having given birth to a son and at the same time suggested the pain which had preceded the happy event.

"The composition of *The Beloved Mother* is so natural, so simple, that the unreflective think they could have imagined it and that such a picture did not demand a great effort of the mind. I would say to these good people: 'Yes, I can well believe that you would have surrounded this mother with her children, and that you would have made them caress her; but would you have made one cry with jealousy because he was not preferred to the others? and would you at this moment have introduced that man so gay, so happy, to be the husband of that fine woman, and so vain to be the father of so many pretty children? would you have made him so plainly say: "It is I who did that!" And the grandmother, would you have thought of bringing her there too? Are you quite sure about it?'

"Now for the setting of the picture. The scene takes place in the country. You see a large room with a low ceiling and, passing from left to right, a bed, at the foot of which is a cat lying on a hassock; then the Beloved Mother thrown back in her long chair with her children clamouring around her. There are at least half a dozen of them; the smallest is in her arms;

THE BELOVED MOTHER (p. 202)

(From an Engraving by Massard)



a second hangs on one side of her, a third on the other side; a fourth, who has climbed over the back of her chair, kisses her forehead; a fifth pecks at her cheek, a sixth, standing, rests his head in her lap and is not at all pleased with his *rôle*. The mother of these children has joy and tenderness imprinted upon her face, with a touch of the discomfort inseparable from the movement and weight of so many boisterous children, who overwhelm her with their violent caresses, which, if long continued, will end by tiring her out. It is this feeling which borders on pain, combined with the tenderness, the joy, the leaning position, the lassitude, and the almost convulsive smile on the half-opened mouth, which gives such a singular character to this head when separated from the rest of the composition.

"In the foreground, around this charming group, are scattered the children's toys. In the background of the *salon*, with her back to the mirror over the chimney-piece, the grandmother—a very grandmotherly person both as regards her head and her dress—is seated in her armchair. She is laughing heartily at what is going on. More to the left and nearer the spectator a dog is barking with delight—he is thoroughly enjoying himself. On the extreme left, almost as far from the grandmother as the latter is from the mother, stands the husband, who has just returned from a shooting expedition. He joins in the scene with extended arms, his body thrown slightly back; he also is laughing. He is a fine fellow, young, vigorous and healthy; and through his air of self-satisfaction one discerns that

he is very proud of having produced this pretty band of children. By the father's side is his dog; behind him, at the extreme left of the canvas, is a linen-basket; and on the threshold of the door one catches a glimpse of a departing servant.

"This picture is excellent from both the technical and the moral point of view. It preaches the gospel of large families and presents with much pathos the happiness, the inestimable blessing, of domestic peace."*

From some of these remarks Diderot appears not quite to have realised that with many women maternal love is not at all a refined sentiment. On the contrary, it is an elemental passion and almost entirely a matter of the senses. Hence he is puzzled and knows not what to make of the voluptuous expression on Anne Gabrielle's face in the character of the Beloved Mother overwhelmed by her children's caresses. It was the naked realism of Greuze's presentment of the maternal instinct, as manifested in a certain type of woman, which caused the fine ladies who visited the Salon to lower their eyes before what is one of the artist's finest conceptions.

It was *The Beloved Mother*, which Madame Geoffrin, the ablest of all the *salonnières* of her time, whose hospitality the artist had often enjoyed, quite good-naturedly described as "a *fricassée* of children." This was reported to Greuze by one of those persons who find other people's business so much more interesting than their own, and made him furiously angry.

"What is the woman thinking about to dare speak

* Diderot (D.) *Salons.*



of a work of art!" he cried. "Let her beware lest I immortalise her! I would paint her as a schoolmistress, with a whip in her hand, and she would be the terror of all children now and ever after!"

It was the habit of Madame Geoffrin to show her particular affection for her friends by occasionally scolding them, and this peculiarity, as a rule, served only to attach them the more strongly to her; but Greuze would brook criticism from nobody except Diderot, and in his case he knew that he would have to put up with it whether he liked it or not. Madame Geoffrin, however, had enough humour to be amused at Greuze's ridiculous outburst.*

The artist who could paint a portrait of his wife *enceinte* for public exhibition, as Greuze did, was not likely to be over nice in his confidences as to the charms of her person, and I strongly suspect that Anne Gabrielle served him as the model for the red chalk drawing, here reproduced, of the lady who feels herself to be inadequately clothed by her modesty.

No such objection can be urged against the painter's large canvas entitled *The Benefactress*, for the principal figure of which Anne Gabrielle again served her husband as model. In this picture there is no touch of the theatricality which mars so much of Greuze's work. The figures are natural, the colouring free from the dirty greys, whites and violets—the characteristic defects of his larger canvases. The picture is, moreover,

* Marmontel (J.F.) *Mémoires. Also* Sainte-Beuve. *Madame Geoffrin.* In *Causeries du lundi.*

full of action and strong in composition, whilst the sentiment is everything that could be desired; these qualities go far to make *The Benefactress* one of the most satisfactory of Greuze's larger canvases.

Nobody, I imagine, would accuse Diderot of prudery, yet the realism of some of Greuze's portraits of his wife almost shocked him.

"I know not how to look at that throat," he says in a letter on one of these portraits exhibited at the Salon; "and yet even at fifty I do not hate throats. The painter has bent the model's head and chest forward, and by this attitude, seems to say to the spectator:

"'Look at my wife's throat!'

"I am looking at it, Monsieur Greuze. Well, to be frank with you, all I can say is that your wife's throat is slack and yellow. If the likeness is good, then so much the worse for you, for her, and for the picture!"

Monsieur Diderot was a candid friend. He then proceeds to tell an anecdote of Monsieur de la Martelière, whose gay wife had a beautiful head.

"Madame Greuze," he says, "also has a very beautiful head"; but he assures the painter that what happened to Monsieur de la Martelière will not happen to him, "for his wife is good." * In this, as we shall see, Diderot was mistaken.

* Diderot (D.) *Salons.*

## CHAPTER XVII

### HOW WEALTH CAME IN AT THE DOOR AND LOVE FLEW OUT OF THE WINDOW.

Who could be happier than Monsieur Greuze? He had a beautiful wife, pretty and affectionate children, good friends, great talent and a growing reputation. He was wholly wrapped up in his art, and was consumed with the desire to paint all that he loved.

"Ah, my dear Greuze!" cried Diderot on one occasion, "how different you are from yourself when it is tenderness rather than interest which guides your brush! Paint your wife, your mistress, your father, your mother, your children, your friends; but I would advise you to send other people who want their portraits painted to Roslin or Michel Van Loo!"

And Monsieur Greuze painted his father, his mother, his children, his friends; but, above all, he delighted to paint his wife. He painted so many charming pictures of Anne Gabrielle and his brush extolled her beauty so incessantly, that at length she acquired an insupportable vanity, and ended by thinking that at least half the merit of the pictures for which she served him as model was due to her. That pretty face and beautiful form of hers spoilt everything. She began

to give herself airs ; she minced her steps and her words, and patched and powdered her face. She spent hours before her mirror. Those tender and innocent eyes began to practise the languid, side-long glances of the professional beauty. That winsome and guileless mouth gradually acquired the fixed, unwholesome smile of the wanton. Those simple dresses which, during the first hard years of her married life, she had made herself out of odds and ends, and which, nevertheless, became her so exceedingly well, were no longer good enough. Now she must go to Mademoiselle Bertin, the most expensive of all the Court dressmakers. Greuze paid the bills like a man, but he did not like it. Besides, he thought that these fashionable clothes destroyed her individuality. Before, she had a way of dressing that was quite her own, part of herself ; but now she looked like every other woman who paraded the streets of Paris in purple and fine linen.

Then she began to neglect her home and her children, one of whom had died. In order to relieve herself of the responsibility of looking after the two girls who remained, she sent them to a convent in the country near Paris. One of them remained there for eleven and the other for twelve years. Anne Gabrielle practically abandoned them, or, at any rate, visited them very rarely. One day, when Greuze went to see them, his elder daughter said : " It is a year and seven days since Mamma came to see us."*

The poor child was terribly upset at this neglect.

* Greuze. *Mémoire* (*Ibid.*).

There was more trouble when Greuze arranged with Flipart to engrave his picture of *The Paralytic*. Anne Gabrielle had persuaded herself that the sales of these engravings would bring in a great deal of money, as, indeed, they did; but she wanted to divide the spoil before the engagement.

"Monsieur," she said, for the turtle-doves had long ceased to coo; "Monsieur, I must have a man servant, and also a carriage."

"You know very well," replied Greuze, "that we have no settled income. All we have, I am obliged to earn, and the livelihood of an artist is, at best, uncertain; consequently we cannot at the present moment afford the extra expense which you propose; but if you will wait until after Easter, I will do my best to satisfy you."*

Anne Gabrielle's face flushed and then turned pale. Her only reply was to give him a stinging box on the ear which sent the artist staggering almost to the floor. Transported with anger, Greuze returned the blow. And there they were, to the great scandal of the neighbours, slapping, scratching, crying, and shouting insults at each other at the top of their voices.

They were both very unhappy; though outwardly they had every appearance of prosperity. Anne Gabrielle, as we have seen, dressed in the costliest silks and satins, and enjoyed every luxury; whilst her husband, who also was fond of fine raiment, went about in a scarlet plush coat and breeches, with rich lace shirt-

* Greuze. *Mémoire* (*Ibid.*).

frill and ruffles, silk stockings, shoes with gold buckles, and an elegant sword by his side. But, properly speaking, the only successful life is the happy life ; and this kind of success—the only one worth having—depends on oneself : it is all a question of will. There would be no unhappy people if all were sufficiently determined to be happy. Jean Baptiste and Anne Gabrielle had not learned that lesson. And so, they had become dissatisfied with their circumstances, which in married life leads inevitably to husband and wife becoming dissatisfied with each other. They were very unhappy indeed.

Then, too, during the last few years, Anne Gabrielle had sadly changed. How was it possible to imagine that the fresh and dainty little *bourgeoise* with the dreamy blue eyes, the bright candid smile and the sentimental air, the model of all the graces and all the virtues, who had inspired so many of the artist's happiest efforts, would, after a few years, be transformed into a quarrelsome, shrieking virago, a rapacious baggage whose shameless cupidity and defiant misconduct well-nigh broke her husband's heart ?

Never was there a more pitiable ending to a charming idyll. It is a painful story which Greuze's Memoir unfolds to us.

There is reason to think that the accompanying drawing of a woman in a linen cap is a study of Anne Gabrielle's head made about this time.

The hour of Greuze had struck. The rich amateurs, the fine ladies and gentlemen of the Court, the farmers



of the taxes and their wives and sweethearts had all succumbed to the charm of the Greuze girl; and the artist, glued day and night before his easel, was now making a great deal of money. All day long his door was beset by the carriages of the great. He lived in the suite of apartments, number 11, Rue des Orties, in the Galleries of the Louvre, between Chardin, who lived at number 12, and the King's goldsmith Aubert l'Avignonnais, who occupied number 10. His studio had become one of the sights of Paris. On his historic sojourn in the capital, Gustavus III, King of Sweden, made a point of calling upon Greuze, and warmly complimented the artist upon his work. The Duchesse de Bourbon, we are told, was a constant visitor, and never left without expressing, with characteristic grace and wit, the great pleasure which the sight of his pictures always gave her. It was she who said: "One would never dare to patronise Monsieur Greuze." One would certainly not.

Most of the great folk who came to the studio bought pictures. M. de la Borde purchased *The Beloved Mother*, which has remained in the possession of his family to this day; the Marquis de Marigny, M. de la Live de Jully, M. Damery, lieutenant of the French Guards, the Comte de Vence, and others acquired picture after picture. *The Paralytic* was purchased for the Empress Catherine II, and is still in the Imperial Gallery at St. Petersburg; whilst the Duchesse de Grammont chose *Throwing a Kiss* as a New Year's gift to her brother the Duc de Choiseul, so that he might hang it beside the

*Votive Offering to Cupid* and the many smaller examples of Greuze's work which adorned his magnificent gallery.

With the acquisition of *Throwing a Kiss* the Duc might well crow over his fellow collectors. Diderot could scarcely contain himself for joy at the mere sight of the picture :

"It is impossible," he cries, "to describe to you all the voluptuousness of this face. Her eyes, her eyelids, are heavy with it. Oh, the loveliness of the hand which has just thrown the kiss ! What a face ! What a mouth ! What lips ! What teeth ! What a bosom ! . . . Just look at her. She is intoxicated with love. She hardly knows what she is doing, or I what I am writing ! "*

The picture cost the Duchesse 2,500 livres, and it was the bargain of a lifetime. It is now in the collection of Mr. Alfred de Rothschild.

But the more money Greuze earned the less Anne Gabrielle seemed to be able to make both ends meet, and the more discontented and quarrelsome she became. This was a sure sign that she had too much. Instead of enjoying what she had and making the most of it, she compared her circumstances with those of people richer than herself. That is always a mistake. There is no more fruitful source of unhappiness. It is better for one's peace of mind to overestimate the value of one's possessions ; but it is better still to enjoy what one has without troubling one's head about its value, commercial or otherwise.

Anne Gabrielle, however, did not stop at wrangling

* Diderot (D.) *Salons.*

with her husband over the family money-box. Greuze had formed a company for the sale of the engravings made from his pictures, his partners in the venture being the four celebrated engravers, Massard, Gaillard, Levasseur and Flipart. Anne Gabrielle went behind her husband's back and very cleverly made other terms with his associates by which the artist himself was excluded from all the business transactions. She knew that he abhorred accounts and was so taken up with his art that he was inclined to neglect his own interests and those of his family. She was determined that her own interests, at any rate, should not suffer, and preferred to manage them herself. She managed them so well that she got all the money into her own hands, and she did not scruple to use it in her own way. And Greuze, sick to death of sordid squabbles, acquiesced in this arrangement. From time to time, however, he looked over her books, and when he noticed any discrepancy, he said:

"Your accounts do not seem to me to be clear."

Whereupon, she would reply scornfully:

"Monsieur, you do not understand anything about book-keeping. I am used to business, and believe me, I can carry on your affairs far better than you can yourself." *

Her voice was hard, peremptory and edged with sarcasm. At the least word, those eyes which had formerly shone only with love, flamed with anger; that adorable mouth which Monsieur Greuze still de-

* Greuze. *Mémoire* (*Ibid.*).

lighted to paint and to kiss when she gave him the opportunity, was filled with insult and invective.

It was difficult to recognise in this threatening and furious woman the vivacious little bookseller who had jumped off the steps, in the snug little shop on the Quai des Augustins, and stood smiling into the eyes of the fascinated young painter a few weeks before he set out for Italy. Who could believe that this was indeed the girl whose smile Monsieur Diderot and his companions had found so very agreeable ?

When Greuze saw that she was bent on quarrelling, he bowed before the storm, for he had never really overcome his timidity, and escaping to his studio, he soon forgot all his troubles in transmitting to canvas those dreams of fair women which carried his fame and Anne Gabrielle's beauty to every country of Europe —so true is it that a man is never so unhappy as he imagines himself to be.

With the money in her keeping, she soon squandered her husband's fortune in every kind of senseless luxury, and when he remonstrated with her, she lied shamelessly. Then she acquired a taste for gambling. To gratify this passion, she ingeniously abstracted large sums from the common funds, and when she lost them at the card tables of her friends or in the gambling-houses of which she now became a regular frequenter, she invented fresh lies to cover her defalcations.

Still Greuze made no attempt to take his business transactions out of her hands. Experience taught him nothing ; and, for that matter, what does it teach



anybody? A man's actions are determined by his character, not by his experience.

One day Anne Gabrielle came to her husband, wringing her hands, her beautiful eyes wet with tears.

"Oh, I am so unhappy!" she sobbed. "I can never forgive myself; without telling you anything about it and hoping to make your fortune I invested between thirty and thirty-six thousand livres in a ship, and I have just heard that the English captured the vessel almost immediately after she left port."

Greuze could scarcely believe his ears.

"How could you do such a thing without insuring the ship, and what was the captain's name?" *

But she could never tell him the name.

What years of strenuous effort were represented by those thirty-six thousand livres! No man ever worked harder for his family than did Greuze; but it was all in vain—no sooner had he earned the money than his wife squandered it. This loss was a cruel blow, though he seems to have taken it quite philosophically. There was no use brooding over the matter; so he set himself resolutely to the task of retrieving his lost fortune. Although Anne Gabrielle's story did not strike him as at all probable, he still left her the management of his business; and we find her, on October 17, 1789, writing to one of her husband's customers, as follows:

"Vous pouvée, monsieur, ceder la tête que vous avee de M. Greuze; il vous en envera une aussitot

* Greuze, *Mémoire* (*Ibid.*).

votre lettre reçue a votre choix entre deux ; et au même prix, l'une est d'un enfant, de la grandeur de la vôtre ; et la plus belle qu'il ait fait ; l'autre est d'une jeune fille ayant la gorge en partie découverte elle semble écouté ; elle est de 2 pouces plus haute et plus large que la vautre, et sera du même prix ; je vous prie de me marqué lorsque vous ferai réponse, par quelle voyture, il faudra remettre la quaisse et votre addresse bien détaillée ; pour que vous n'essuiee point de retare, M. Greuze vous fait ses compliments.

" J'ai l'honneur d'être très parfaitement, monsieur, votre très humble servante,

" B. GREUZE." *

" You can, Sir, give up the head which you have from Mr. Greuze ; he will send you another as soon as he receives your letter giving you the choice between two ; and at the same price, one is of a child of the same size as yours, and the most beautiful he has done ; the other is of a young girl with her throat partly uncovered, she seems to listen ; it is two inches deeper and broader than yours, and will be the same price ; I beg you to indicate, when replying, by which carriage the case must be remitted and your address very clearly ; in order that you may not meet with any delay. Mr. Greuze sends you his compliments.

" I have the honour to be very perfectly, Sir, your very humble servant,

" B. GREUZE."

* Charavay (E.) In *La Revue des Documents historiques*, 1874.

It is clear from this letter that, although her spelling may have been open to improvement, Anne Gabrielle knew her business; and if only she could have kept straight, her husband might have done worse than leave his affairs in her hands.

On January 6 of the following year, we have another business letter to the same client:

"M. Greuze, monsieur, ce fera un véritable plaisir de vous donner la préférence, sur toute autre personne; ils remplira, exactement; toutes les conditions que vous exigée;

"Mais il faut me faire, réponce aussitôt ma lettre reçue; pour surté de nos engagements; le tableau est de deux cents louis; et la bordure de noirs; M. Greuze, vous prie; de n'avoir aucune inquiétudes sur la tête de l'enfant qu'il vous a envoyés; le bois est très solide; il est impocible qu'il ce fende; ils vous prie insie que moi de vouloire bien être persuadé des sentiments avec les quelles j'ai l'honneur d'être monsieur,

"Votre très heumble servante,

"B. GREUZE.

"Je vous prie de ne point oubliee de danté votre lettre."*

"Mr. Greuze, Sir, will give himself a real pleasure in giving you the preference before all others; he will fulfil exactly; all the conditions which you stipulate;

* Charavay (E.) In *La Revue des Documents historiques*, 1874.

"But it will be necessary to let me have your reply as soon as you receive my letter in order to ensure the fulfilment of our engagements; the picture is two hundred louis; and the frame of walnut; Mr. Greuze begs you not to be uneasy on account of the child's head which he has sent you; the wood is very solid; it is impossible for it to be broken; he begs you as well as myself to be good enough to believe the sentiments with which I have the honour to be sir,

"Your very humble servant,

"B. GREUZE.

"I beg you not to forget to frank your letter."

Both these letters were addressed to M. Fontanel, Librarian and Curator of the Academy at Montpellier.

Yes, Anne Gabrielle was a shrewd little woman, there is no doubt about that; and she had a very natural objection to franking other people's letters!

So, with his wife's help, Greuze made more money than ever. For some years he was financially the most successful artist of his time. Each new picture that he painted met with a chorus of praise. He received for one of his small canvases more money than the good Chardin would ever have dreamed of asking for half-a-dozen of his large ones. Even the first sketches of his pictures and his innumerable studies in red chalk, several of which are reproduced in illustration of this volume, found ready purchasers.

The only pictures, indeed, that he had any difficulty to dispose of were his moral melodramas, in which he



tried to make people think. That is a fault which the public find it hard to forgive in an artist; and who shall say that they are wrong? But they showed their indulgence for Greuze's foible by lavishly praising even these; though they would not buy them, in which they showed sound sense. *The Paralytic* remained in his studio for years before he had the good fortune to sell it to the Russian Empress. The Court heard about this picture, and sent for it; but, although it was very much admired, His Majesty made no offer to purchase it, and "this inestimable happiness" cost the painter twenty crowns.

However, Anne Gabrielle did a very brisk trade in all the other products of her husband's brush, and when she had stolen so much money that it was no longer possible to deny her thefts, she calmly tore up all the registers. And when Greuze indignantly protested:

"But, Madame, what could you have been thinking about to destroy the books?" she replied:

"Because it pleased me to do so! And I do not intend to render any account of my actions to you!" *

When Greuze finally separated from her, he found that the sales of the engravings alone had realised no less than three hundred thousand livres, of which sum one hundred and twenty thousand were missing. Anne Gabrielle may have been, as she often said, a good business woman, but she was certainly an expensive one.

* Greuze, *Mémoire* (*Ibid.*).

## CHAPTER XVIII

### HOW MONSIEUR GREUZE QUARRELLED WITH THE ACADEMY.

GREUZE had allowed more than ten years to pass since he was made *agréé* of the Academy without presenting the masterpiece which it was customary for an artist to submit within six months of his reception. It was by this picture that an artist's position in the Academy was determined. Greuze's negligence in complying with the conditions of his election was extremely embarrassing to the Academicians, and they were anxious that a painter whose works were so greatly and so justly admired should qualify for the full academic honours to which his talents entitled him. As the artist still made no attempt to fulfil the conditions of membership, the Academicians instructed their Secretary formally to request him to do so with as little delay as possible. This request Greuze seems to have ignored. Accordingly, in 1767 he was informed that he would not that year be allowed to exhibit at the Salon. Even now, they spared his feelings in every possible way, and their decision was conveyed to him by the Secretary, Cochin the great engraver, in a most cordial and flattering letter, in which he assured the artist how

ÉTIENNE JEAURAT (p. 120)

(Louvre, Paris)

*Photo by Lévy et ses frères*



sincerely he and his colleagues desired to welcome him among them as a full Academician.

"I have seen this letter," says Diderot, "which is a model of courtesy and friendliness; and I have seen Greuze's answer, which is a model of vanity and impertinence; only a masterpiece could wipe out the memory of it, and that is precisely what Greuze has not done."

When the artist at length decided to paint the long-delayed picture, he chose as his subject:

"Septimus Severus reproaching his son Caracalla for having attempted his life in the defiles of Scotland. Septimus, having sent for his son, says to him: 'If thou desirest my death, order Papinian to kill me!'"

"You will remember, my friend," says Diderot in his letter to Grimm on the subject, "you saw the first sketch of this picture in the artist's studio, and you will agree with me that this drawing gave every promise of a beautiful picture. Although the painter has changed his canvas, the composition remains essentially the same. The scene passes in the early morning. Septimus is sitting up in his bed, half naked; he is speaking to Caracalla. His left hand is that of a man giving orders; his right, directed towards a sword resting against a table at the side of the bed, explains the subject of his discourse. Papinian and a senator are standing at the head of the bed behind the Emperor; whilst Caracalla stands at the foot. Caracalla has the character of a wicked man, more ashamed at being found out than repentant of his crime. Septimus

speaks with force and gravity. Papinian appears to be profoundly grieved ; the senator looks astonished." *

The circumstances attending the reception of Greuze's picture created such a stir in art circles that at Grimm's request Diderot returns to the subject in a second letter.

" The Septimus Severus is of an ignoble character," writes the critic ; " he has the dark, tanned skin of a galley slave ; his action is equivocal. He is badly drawn. His wrist is broken. There is an inordinate distance between the neck and the sternum. One cannot tell where the right knee, which raises the bed cover, ends, nor to whom it belongs.

" Caracalla is even more ignoble than his father ; he is a vile, base-born knave ; the painter has not had the art to combine wickedness with dignity. It is, moreover, a wooden figure, without movement and without suppleness ; it is Antinous rigged up in Roman clothes ; I am as sure of it as if the artist had told me so in confidence.

" ' But,' you will say, ' if the Caracalla is a copy of the Antinous, it should be a beautiful figure.' To that I answer : ' Get a Raphael to draw the Antinous, and you will have a masterpiece. But get the Antinous copied by an ignoramus, and you will have a cold and wretched drawing.' ' But, surely, Greuze is not an ignoramus ? ' ' My dear fellow, the cleverest man in the world is an ignoramus when he tries to do something which he has never done before ! ' Greuze has here forsaken the style in which he excelled. A scrupu-

* Diderot (D.) *Salons.*

lous imitator of nature, he has failed to rise to the kind of exaggeration demanded by historical painting. His Caracalla would go wondrous well in a country, domestic scene; he would do, at a pinch, for the wicked brother of that big boy who stands listening to the old man reading the Bible to his children. . . .

"The head of Papinian, though very fine, is not in proportion to the rest of the figure. . . .

"The head of the senator, in the background, is perhaps still finer than that of Papinian.

"The linen and cover of the Emperor's bed are in the worst possible taste, both as regards colouring and drawing.

"But that is not the worst: the whole picture is weak in every principle of art. The background touches the curtain of the Emperor's bed, and the curtain touches the figures: there is no depth in the picture, no magic. It seems as though the artist has in some mysterious manner been deprived of that part of his talent which one would have thought it impossible for him to lose. Chardin has told me twenty times over that to him the whole thing is an inexplicable phenomenon. There is no colour, no truth of detail, no harmony, nothing 'brought off': all is dull, hard and crude. It is the picture of a student, and is too good for there to be any hope of his ever doing better. Take this criticism to the Salon and compare it with the picture; you may find that something might be added to it, but that there is nothing to retract." *

* Diderot (D.) *Salons.*

In short, Diderot felt that he was wasting his time and that of his correspondent in attempting to criticise such a picture ; and most people who happen to notice it on the sky-line at the Louvre will agree with every word he said. There is no denying the fact, the picture is about as bad as it could be ; as " weary, flat, stale and unprofitable " a piece of melodrama as ever faced the footlights. The design is tawdry, the colouring almost beneath contempt, the figures wooden, and, what is perhaps worse, their heads appear to be made of the same material. It is bad enough to have to deal with wooden heads in everyday life without artists being at the trouble of transmitting them to canvas.

When the picture was completed, Greuze announced the fact with a blare of trumpets and confidently submitted it to the judgment of the assembled Academicians. The canvas was placed upon an easel in the middle of the hall, and the members examined it at leisure. Meanwhile, in another room, the artist awaited their decision without much inquietude as to the result.

An hour later, the folding doors which divided the two rooms opened, and Greuze was invited to enter.

" Monsieur," said the Director, " the Academy receives you ; be so good as to come forward and take the oath."

Very pleased with himself, Greuze underwent all the ceremonies in connection with his reception.

When all was over, the Director said :

"Monsieur, the Academy has elected you, but as a *genre* painter. It has taken into consideration your former pictures, which are excellent, and has shut its eyes to the present one, which is worthy neither of the Academy nor of yourself."

This was a cruel blow to the proud and timid artist. The decision deprived him of the hope of a professorship on which he had set his heart, for these posts were reserved for classical painters alone.

Overwhelmed with rage and mortification, poor Greuze lost his head and began to argue the matter out with the Academicians. They listened, many of them with mocking smiles, to what he had to say; and then La Grenée had the meanness to take a pencil from his pocket and mark on the canvas the faults of drawing and composition.* But the artist still maintained that his picture was a masterpiece. Without going so far as that, most people will agree that the Academy might have devised a less humiliating way of recording their opinion of the canvas. They had evidently not forgotten the artist's haughty reply to their Secretary's letter. It was a famous victory. In their hour of triumph the Academicians had shown their magnanimity by bitterly humiliating one of their most illustrious fellow artists. Had they not every reason to congratulate themselves?

"What would another have done in Greuze's position?" asks Diderot. "Why, any one else, I, for example, would have taken out my pocket-knife and cut the

* Diderot (D.) *Salons*.

picture into pieces. Then I would have passed the frame over my shoulders and carried it off, telling the Academy as I went that I chose to be neither a *genre* nor a classical painter. I would have gone home and framed the marvellous heads of Papinian and the senator, which I would have saved whilst destroying the rest ; and the Academy would have been confounded and dishonoured. Yes, my friend, dishonoured ; for Greuze's picture before being presented passed for a masterpiece, and the fragments which I would have preserved would have perpetuated this belief. People would have judged of the beauty of the rest of the picture by these remains, and an art-lover would have been glad to buy them at almost any price." *

Convinced of the merit of his work, Greuze returned home to Anne Gabrielle, who, instead of consoling him in his disappointment, overwhelmed him with bitter reproaches and sarcastic allusions to his failure.

He made the mistake of allowing the picture to be exhibited at the Salon, and thus delivered himself into the hands of his enemies, whilst those who sympathised with him and would willingly have defended him on the strength of the preliminary sketch which they had seen, were now compelled to acknowledge the mediocrity of the finished picture. It is, however, possible that the Academy would not permit him to withdraw the work.

Not content to let the matter rest there, Greuze appealed to the public, and we find him writing as follows to the Editor of the *Avant Coureur* :

* *Supplément aux Œuvres de Diderot.* 1818.

"In your last issue, which contains an account of the pictures exhibited at the Salon, you have done me two injustices, which, as an honourable man, you ought to retract in your next number. In the first place, instead of treating me like my fellow artists, to each of whom you have given his meed of praise, you have deliberately singled out my classical picture in order to tell the public how Poussin, according to you, would have treated the same subject. I have no doubt, Sir, that he would have made a sublime picture of it, but he would certainly have treated it in a manner quite different from what you say. I beg you to believe that I have studied the works of that great man as closely as you could have done, and that, above all, I have endeavoured to learn from him the art of expression. You, it is true, have taken a wider view, since, as you justly remark, he put the clasps of his mantles on the right side, whilst I, in my folly, have placed that of Caracalla on the left. That is a grave error, I admit. But I will not yield so readily on the character which you say he would have given to the Emperor. Everybody knows that Severus was the most passionate, the most violent of men, and you maintain that, when he says to his son: 'If you desire my death, order Papinian to kill me with that sword!' he should have a calm and tranquil look, as Solomon might have had under similar circumstances. I would ask every sensible man: 'Is that the expression suitable to the physiognomy of this redoubtable Emperor?'

"An even greater injustice is that, after having con-

sidered how Poussin would have treated this subject, you credit me with painting Geta, Caracalla's brother, in the person whom I have placed behind Papinian. Now, in the first place, Geta was not present at this scene; it was Castor the chamberlain, who, according to Moréri, was the most faithful servant of Severus. In the second place, gratuitously supposing, as you do, that I meant to represent Geta, you ought to have reproached me for having made him too old, for he was the younger brother of Caracalla. Thirdly, I have again blundered in not painting him in armour. See, Sir, how many absurdities you lend me in order to be able to exercise your criticism. I believe you to be too honest to refuse me the satisfaction of giving publicity to my letter in your journal on Monday. I ought to be allowed to explain my picture as I conceived it and rectify the construction which, without consulting either history or myself, you have chosen to put upon it.

"Could you have the wish to discourage an artist who makes every sacrifice in order to merit the good will with which the public have, up to the present, honoured him? Why openly attack me at my first attempt in a new style which I hope in time to perfect? Why oppose me, alone of all my colleagues, to the most skilful artist of our school? If you have done so in order to flatter me, the device is not happy, for in the whole article I could see only an obvious intention to offend me. I shall recognise that you had no such design, unworthy of an impartial critic, only when you

have been good enough to print my letter in your columns." *

But the artist's explanation left the public cold. It was generally felt that Greuze, a masterly painter of the simple events and the homely pathos of everyday life, was out of his element in the heroic style. He was taken to task by one critic for having unearthed an obscure event, an enigmatical and complicated action, unsuitable for artistic treatment, instead of adopting Diderot's suggestion of the Death of Brutus as the subject of his picture. The writer then dwelt on the faults of composition, design and colour, and concluded by asking if Teniers was any the less Teniers for not having painted the Court of Augustus, or if Préville was not one of the most accomplished actors of the Comédie Française although he did not play the rôle of Mithridates.

It would be interesting to know how far the daily misery of his domestic life was responsible for the artist's failure. Diderot, at least, was clearly of opinion that Anne Gabrielle's conduct was directly responsible for the mediocrity of her husband's effort in the classical style. As the de Goncourts well say:

" By dint of her unreasonable demands, her quarrels, her violence, her perversity, her stupid malice, she robbed Greuze of the peace, the energy, the courage, the liberty and the quietude of mind so essential to the artist who would create strong and beautiful things. Diderot shows her tiring the painter out with her constant teasing, impairing his strength with her mean-

* *L'Avant Coureur, lundi, 25 Septembre,* 1769.

nesses, using up his moral force, upsetting the order of his days, constantly breaking in upon his thoughts, his compositions, his sketches, and creating by her caprices and her infidelities a veritable hell around his easel." *

So far, the writers agree with Diderot, but when he proceeds to state confidently that had Greuze been happily married he would have become a great classical painter, they rightly decline to follow him.

It is easy to overestimate feminine influence in the development of genius. The fact is that every great artist can do without it, for he has an androgynous mind. Who will maintain that the sculpture of the Greeks, of the best period, the masterpieces of Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Cellini, of Homer, Dante, Milton, and Shakespeare in *Hamlet, King Lear,* and *Julius Cæsar* were in any way inspired by woman? The artist lives a life apart in a world of his own imagination; and the fact that Greuze, in whom the feminine and romantic note was so strong, produced much of his best work amid the wreck of his domestic happiness goes far to prove the truth of this contention. For, in spite of their sensitive hearts and their great intuitive power, few women have any conception of, or sympathy with, what constitutes the highest and deepest ambitions of the imaginative artist. They are, generally speaking, too practical, too ready to counsel him to barter the hypothetical laurels of the future for the cakes and ale

* Goncourt (E. et J. de) *L'Art du XVIII^e Siècle.* Greuze.

MADAME DE PORCIN (p. 243)

(Museum, Angers)

*Photo by Messrs. W. A. Mansell & Co., London*



of the present. Lack of what we may call artistic conscience is, indeed, often the defect of even those women who write books and paint pictures.

Greuze was so indignant at what he considered the arbitrary and unjust decision of the Academy that he went so far as to send in his resignation ; but the official Pierre replied that "It was His Majesty's command that he should be a Member of the Academy." Thereupon, Greuze voluntarily withdrew from the exhibitions at the Salon.

Still suffering under the wounds which the Academy had inflicted upon his vanity, the artist left Paris and went to stay for some months with friends in Anjou. Whilst here, he painted several pictures which, for many years, drew large numbers of visitors to the gallery of Livois, including his fine portrait of Madame de Porcin, now in the Angers Museum.

On his return to Paris, he regularly held exhibitions in his studio, and the public supported him in his quarrel by flocking to see his pictures.

## CHAPTER XIX

### OF MONSIEUR BLONDEL D'AZINCOURT, CONNOISSEUR; THE BROKEN PITCHER, AND OTHER MATTERS.

THE fact that his wife had posed as the model for many of Greuze's most gracious pictures became so well known that not a few of the smart Society people who visited his studio came not only to see the fashionable painter at work, but especially in the hope of catching a glimpse of the model whose beauty he had made famous. And Anne Gabrielle, being fond of flattery, saw to it that they were not disappointed; whilst the daring compliments she received whenever she made her appearance served but to increase her vanity and insolence towards her husband when the couple were left to themselves. Among these curious ones was Monsieur Blondel d'Azincourt, the son of a famous art collector, and himself a distinguished connoisseur, whose knowledge and patronage of the Arts had lately been rewarded by an Associateship of the Academy. This accomplished young gentleman, who possessed a handsome face, a well-turned figure and the most elegant manners that you could wish to see, attracted Anne Gabrielle's attention on his first visit to the studio;

and when he came again—as everybody did after seeing her—she openly practised her newly acquired talents upon him.

Monsieur Blondel d'Azincourt leisurely examined his hostess with the eyes of a connoisseur. He looked at her gravely and thoughtfully, as though she had been a racer which he was about to purchase. He saw the sweet provocation of the smiling mouth, adorned with teeth like a string of pearls ; he noted the candid blue eyes, the voluptuous promise of the soft, round throat, and came to the conclusion that the painter had not unduly exaggerated his wife's charms.

His reply to Anne Gabrielle's advances was prompt and of an extreme vivacity. The artist being away, Monsieur d'Azincourt drew her behind the screen used by the models to shut off part of the studio as a dressing room, and kissed her passionately.

After that, the elegantly dressed and carefully perfumed connoisseur became a frequent visitor ; he came so often that the artist soon began to wish him further.

" It was M. d'Azincourt," he afterwards wrote, in his heart-rending *Mémoire,* " who was originally the cause of the disorders in my house. He came there first as an amateur ; but soon Mme Greuze took possession of him and loved him madly. One day she had the cruelty to make me the confidant of her passion, although she assured me that on both sides the attachment was a pure and tender one. The unpleasantness which I experienced at the Academy was largely owing

to him, for he was intimate with all the artists. I have always greatly suspected that Mme Greuze deliberately planned with him to bring this humiliation upon me. She is no longer my wife, but an enemy with whom I am obliged to live, who sets traps for me at every step I take." *

Monsieur d'Azincourt made himself quite at home in the artist's quarters. Scarcely a day passed without his mounting the stairs and unceremoniously pushing open the door of the studio, where he would be welcomed by Anne Gabrielle with melting eyes and burning kisses. If the artist happened to be present, Monsieur d'Azincourt was not in the least embarrassed, for he was an adept in conducting an intrigue of this sort. At such times he would haughtily look over the painter's shoulder and, after exchanging a few commonplaces, he would bow coldly and take his leave, with head erect, shoulders thrown back, his jewelled sword by his side, his beaver under his arm, and so well satisfied with himself that the artist could hear him whistling as he descended the stairs.

Monsieur d'Azincourt was not a discreet lover, and his adventure with Anne Gabrielle soon got abroad, for when the latter went to consult one of Greuze's friends with respect to a separation, and referred to herself as a good wife, he said:

"Oh, Madame, you forget the studio screen!" †

Anne Gabrielle saved Monsieur d'Azincourt from inviting the ridicule which, among his set, attached

* Greuze. *Mémoire* (*Ibid.*). † *Ibid.*

to constancy in love. She conceived a passion for one of her husband's pupils. One evening, when Greuze returned home unexpectedly, he found the pupil standing with his back to the chimneypiece looking exceedingly foolish, whilst Anne Gabrielle appeared to be scarcely less embarrassed. If they were not guilty, they looked extremely like it.

"I thought it expedient," says Greuze, "to dismiss the young man on the spot. Then there was despair in the house. There stood Mme Greuze with a knife in her hand, threatening to do away with herself. She made no attempt, however, to use the knife, and I remained inexorable."*

Having in this instance acted firmly, Greuze heard no more of the matter.

A few weeks later, however, there was fresh cause for complaint. When, some years before, Greuze was living in furnished apartments at a glazier's in the Rue des Vieux Augustins, he made the acquaintance of a certain fruiterer who supplied him with faggots during the winter. One day, this man came to see him at the Louvre, to seek his advice about his son, who had shown some aptitude for painting. Greuze, with his habitual kindness towards young artists, cordially promised to help the youth, and invited him to come to his studio whenever he happened to be in difficulties. The youth, having observed that Madame took a great deal of interest in him, with her connivance, arranged to be very often in difficulties. Anne Gabrielle, in her in-

* Greuze. *Mémoire* (*Ibid.*).

fatuation, entrusted large sums of money to the lad; but as he was already a thoroughly bad character, she soon had reason to complain of him, and even went so far as to have him arrested for robbing her of no less than fifteen thousand livres. He was taken before M. Muron, a police officer, and the father was advised of his son's arrest. Although overwhelmed with grief that his boy should be suspected of theft, the honest fruiterer could not help saying:

"Madame, my son is only a child and you are a woman of the world! How could you think of entrusting to him such a very large sum of money? But as I am an honest man and do not wish you to lose everything, I will give you a mortgage of 2,000 livres on my house in the Rue des Vieux Augustins, which sum you shall receive upon my death." *

The agreement was accordingly drawn up by M. Prévost, the notary in the Rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs, by whom the sum agreed upon was duly paid over to Anne Gabrielle upon the fruiterer's death, which occurred shortly afterwards. Madame Greuze spent a portion of this money on the purchase of a carriage, upon which she had long set her heart.

One would have thought that this misadventure, which had other and even more serious consequences, would cure Anne Gabrielle of her taste for romancing; but no, the affair had scarcely blown over, when she made the acquaintance of Monsieur de Saint-Maurice, a Privy Councillor, who during the Revolution

* Greuze. *Mémoire* (*Ibid.*).

became an *émigré*. This consummate scoundrel cruelly imposed upon the unfortunate Greuze. Posing as the artist's friend, he set himself deliberately to corrupt his wife's heart, and succeeded only too thoroughly. Not content with that infamy, he encouraged her to steal yet more money from her husband, and persuaded her to make a settlement upon his son. With a portion of the money, she purchased from her unscrupulous lover a life annuity of a thousand livres. The intrigue continued for several months without arousing Greuze's suspicion, but at last he had unequivocal evidence of their cynical faithlessness.

In the bitterness of his heart he could have killed them; but by a great effort, he restrained himself. He could not trust himself to speak. With a haggard face and trembling in every limb, the unhappy artist fled from the studio.

On the morrow he bitterly reproached his wife with her misconduct.

Anne Gabrielle looked him straight in the eyes without flinching.

"It is true," she said very deliberately; "but I don't care a rap!" *

Poor Greuze made an effort to reply, but tears choked the words in his throat, for he knew that his happiness, his faith, his love were irremediably shattered.

Anne Gabrielle's conduct now became so disorderly that she was the talk of artistic Paris, and some wretched

* Greuze. *Mémoire* (*Ibid.*).

jester had nothing better to do than to put on sale a caricature of Madame Greuze with this dedication :

" To the very high, very mighty, and very ridiculous Dame, the wife of J. B. Greuze, lately admitted to the Academy as a *genre* painter on the strength of a historical picture."

In the middle of the plate the engraver had erected a pyramid, at the summit of which he had placed a woman's head, apparently that of Anne Gabrielle. Underneath was written the name " *Creuse,*" followed by the legend :

" One day, when standing at the head of her old, wind-driven hackney, Greuze said to Jeannette : ' I wish to cover thee with glory. I will produce a picture which shall horrify all honest people. Thou shalt serve me as model, my darling, for I desire to paint a wicked woman ! ' "

This is followed by an explanation of the obelisk, in these terms :

" M. le Vasseur (who engraved the *Stepmother*) crushed by the fall of the obelisk erected to the defunct glory of Greuze—an accident caused by a pin-prick in one of the bladders which served as the base of the edifice, on which is seen the portrait of Greuze crowned with thistles, peacock's feathers, etc., the whole ending in a whistle. New edition, revised, corrected and enlarged, the first edition having been exhausted in three days." *

* Goncourt (E. et J. de) *L'Art du XVIII^e Siècle.* Greuze.

One does not envy the man who could find it in his heart to make a jest of such a tragedy.

Greuze now felt that he could no longer remain in his official apartments at the Louvre. In February 1780 he accordingly gave them up, and removed to a house in the Rue Thibaut-aux-dès (*Thibotodé*, as he spells it), now the Rue des Bourdonnais. With characteristic thoughtfulness for others, he offered his apartments in the palace to his friend Mercier, author of the *Tableau de Paris*, who was in straitened circumstances. In his old age, when Mercier was sitting one day with Delort on a bench in the Restaurant Labbaye, he said :

" Greuze and I are two great painters of the manners and customs of the Parisians (at least Greuze recognised me as such). . . . Greuze, who was much attached to me, wanted to give up to me his apartments in the gallery of the Louvre, in the Rue des Orties, because, he said, it was not sunny enough for him, whereas I had no need of sunlight in order to write." *

Anne Gabrielle had now acquired all the airs of the practised coquette. Dressed in the costliest silks and satins, and powdered, rouged, and perfumed, she went out at all hours and was not ashamed to be seen in the company of the shadiest characters in the public resorts of Paris.

In the hope of getting her away from the undesirable acquaintances she had lately formed, Greuze

* Delort. *Mes Voyages aux environs de Paris.* Vol. II., Paris, 1821.

again moved, this time to the Rue Notre Dame des Victoires.

"Going rapidly from bad to worse," writes the artist, "and having well feathered her own nest at my expense, she abandoned her house to the servants, and neglected even her kitchen to such an extent that her saucepans became full of verdigris; at least, I assume that this must have been the case, for on Christmas Eve, I had some broth warmed for me, and immediately after taking it, was seized with such violent illness that I nearly died. For fourteen hours, without relief, I was in convulsions. Doctors and apothecaries were sent for in vain. Nobody would come to me, until at seven o'clock in the morning, M. Le Doux came to see me by chance, and ordered me to take a preparation of opium. That was nearly twelve years ago, and I have suffered severely with pains in the chest ever since." *

One night the artist woke with a start to find Anne Gabrielle, in her nightdress, standing over him and threatening to dash out his brains, in precisely the same manner as Mrs. Pepys, mad with jealousy, in the middle of one memorable night, stood over the equally terrified Diarist. But whereas the first incident is tragic, the second is highly comic. This is probably because the reader feels that the faithless Samuel richly deserved the fright which his incensed wife gave him.

From the Rue Notre Dame des Victoires, Greuze removed his tragic home to the Rue Basse, Porte Saint-

* Greuze. *Mémoire* (*Ibid.*).

Denis. Here husband and wife lived quite apart, Greuze and his two daughters occupying one half of the house, and Anne Gabrielle with her own servants the other. But the painter had not been long in his new quarters, when several persons reported to him that his wife was receiving very shady people. As he had two young girls in the house, he felt that he could not possibly tolerate such conduct. So one evening, when he saw a young man enter Anne Gabrielle's apartments, he went after him and asked him what he wanted.

"I have come to see Madame Greuze," said the intruder insolently.

"Monsieur, my wife receives only those persons whom I have introduced to her, and I do not know you."

"That's all the same to me," replied the man. "I shall come to see Madame whenever she invites me." *

Then, becoming yet more insolent under the encouragement of Anne Gabrielle, he threatened the artist with his fist. To avoid the additional scandal of a brawl, Greuze retired, and the next morning, Sunday, December 11th, 1785, he appeared before M. Chenu, Commissary of Police, to make his deposition respecting the events of the previous night and to obtain an injunction against their repetition. This he followed up by taking legal proceedings for a formal separation from his wife, and in support of his case he wrote the *Mémoire* of the events summarised in the preceding pages.

After a great deal of delay Greuze succeeded in his

* Greuze. *Mémoire* (*Ibid.*).

case, and the couple were legally separated. It was agreed that the household goods should be equally divided, in spite of the fact that Greuze had his two daughters to keep. The artist further agreed to pay his wife 1,350 livres a year, including the 1,000 livres annuity for which she had already arranged with Saint-Maurice. Of the rest of Anne Gabrielle's career we know nothing, and I dare say few people would care to know more.

It was in the midst of the ruin of his home that Greuze painted one of his most characteristic, one of his most charming pictures.

In *The Broken Pitcher* (and several other pictures, such as *The Broken Mirror*) he has symbolised the shipwreck of his happiness as a husband and a lover. The first-named piece won immediate and extraordinary success, and is to this day perhaps one of the most popular pictures in the world.

Fashionable Paris came in crowds to the artist's studio and went into raptures over the masterpiece, little suspecting the unutterable misery of the famous painter's heart.

Among his visitors was Mlle Phlipon, the future Mme Roland. In a letter to her friend Sophie Cannet, dated September 19th, 1777, at 11 o'clock at night, she has given a vivacious account of her visit to Greuze's studio.

"Last Thursday, my dear Sophie, I recalled with tenderness, the pleasure we experienced two years ago

in calling upon M. Greuze; for I went again to his studio for the same cause which then conducted us thither. The subject of his picture is *The Father's Curse*. I will not undertake to describe it in detail; that would take too long. I will content myself with remarking that, in spite of the number and variety of passions expressed by the artist with force and truth, the work, as a whole, does not produce the touching impression which we both felt in looking at the other. The nature of the subject would seem to indicate the reason of this difference. I should be inclined to urge against M. Greuze that the colouring of all his pictures is too grey, were it not for the fact that on the same day I saw a piece in quite a different style which he was so very kind as to let me see. It represents a little girl, naïve, fresh and charming, who has just broken her pitcher: she holds it on her arm near the fountain where the accident has just occurred. Her eyes are not too wide-awake, her mouth is still half open; she is trying to account for the misfortune, and scarcely knows whether it was her fault or not. It would be impossible to imagine anything prettier or more piquant. The only thing with which one might reasonably reproach M. Greuze is that he has not made his little one sufficiently grieved to cause her in the future to resist the temptation of returning to the fountain. I told him this, and the pleasantry amused him.

"He did not this year criticise Rubens. I was more pleased with his appearance. He told me the kind things the Emperor had said to him. 'Have you been

to Italy, Monsieur?' 'Yes, M. le Comte,* I lived there for two years.' 'You did not get your style there; that is quite your own; you are the poet of your pictures.' This was a very subtle *mot*: it has two meanings. I was mischievous enough to lay stress upon one by saying in a complimentary tone: 'It is true that if anything could add to the expressiveness of your pictures it is your descriptions of them.' The author's vanity served me well. M. Greuze seemed to be flattered by my remark. I remained with him for about three-quarters of an hour. I had only Mignonne with me; there were not many people in the studio, so I had him almost to myself.

"I had a good mind to add to the praise I had given him:

> "On dit, Greuze, que ton pinceau
> N'est pas celui de la vertu romaine;
> Mais il peint la nature humaine:
> C'est le plus sublime tableau;

but I held my tongue, which was certainly the best thing I could do." †

*The Broken Pitcher* was painted some years before the date of Mlle Phlipon's letter, and was engraved by Massard in 1773. This plate was dedicated in flattering terms to the witty operatic singer Sophie

* The Emperor Joseph II travelled under the name of the Comte de Falkenstein. Before leaving Paris in August 1777, he sent Greuze a patent of nobility and 4,000 ducats, to help him support his new rank. The artist does not appear to have been unduly impressed by the dignity —he probably knew that in Austria barons are as thick as blackberries.

† Dauban (C.A.) *Ed. Lettres choisies de Madame Roland.*



Arnould. It was about this time that Greuze painted the fascinating Sophie's portrait, now in the Wallace Gallery, as also that of her beautiful actress friend, Mlle du Thé, in the character of Flora. Sophie's wit was mordant, and spared neither friend nor foe. She often amused herself by composing verses bringing in the names of her colleagues of the Opera and those of their transient lovers, thus :

"A Durfort il faut *Du Thé*
C'est sa fantaisie,
Soubise, moins dégoûté,
Aime *La Prairie*,
Mais Bouillon, qui pour son *Roy*
Mettrait tout en désarroi,
Aime mieux *La Guerre*
O gué !
Aime mieux *La Guerre*."

One of the wittiest things Sophie ever said was that she could never see Mlle Guimard (who was very thin) dance her famous *pas-de-trois* with Vestris and Dauberval without thinking of two dogs fighting over a bone.

## CHAPTER XX

### IN WHICH MONSIEUR GREUZE LAYS DOWN HIS BRUSH.

It was in December 1785 that Greuze finally separated from Anne Gabrielle. Thenceforward, he lived alone with his daughters, Anne Geneviève and Louise Gabrielle, both of whom had shown considerable talent for painting.

The artist was now an old man, and his domestic worries had not improved his health; whilst of his whole fortune there remained to him an income of 1,350 livres, his wife having taken the rest as her share of the common funds.

The coming Revolution brought other troubles upon him. His imagination was as active, his hand as skilful as ever; but the taste of the public had changed, and they had ceased to buy his pictures. His clients—the great nobles, the financiers, the wealthy art lovers and collectors—were ruined, had emigrated, or were in hiding. The people who had grown rich under the Revolution—the stock-jobbers, the army contractors, the proprietors of gambling-houses—dared not show their wealth and, moreover, cared nothing for Art. Besides, the new era had evolved an art of its own, and compositions in the heroic style—or *pompiers* as, in allusion to the profusion of helmets, they are pleasantly called in the

THE BROKEN MIRROR (p. 254)

(Wallace Collection, London)

*Photo by Messrs. W. A. Mansell & Co., London*



Art Schools of Paris—the style which David had brought to perfection, formed the only kind of art that the citizens of the new age had any use for. In 1792 Greuze's position was so desperate that some friends procured him a pension of 1,537 livres 10 sous on the royal treasury under the title of a national recompense. But Greuze did not long enjoy even this moderate income, for, on the downfall of the Monarchy, all such gratuities were abolished, the new men looking upon peers and pensioners with the greatest suspicion as parasites, not only useless to the State, but even dangerous to republican virtue.

Like so many other young artists, David, the leader of the new school of painters, had been befriended by Greuze, and when the former became one of the most powerful of the revolutionary chiefs, he showed his gratitude by protecting his benefactor in the storm-tossed capital. This was not always an easy matter, for the old painter had little sympathy with the revolutionary cause, and never cured himself of the habit of saying what he thought about men and things with the greatest candour.

When, during the Terror, David called upon him in all the glory of his tricolour sash as a member of the Convention, to tell him some great piece of news, Greuze would pleasantly inquire :

"Who is King this morning, my friend?"

Ardent revolutionist as he was, David nevertheless submitted with good grace to Greuze's raillery, which might have cost another man his head, and throughout

the Terror the younger artist's powerful influence shielded his old friend in every possible way.

When Romney visited Paris in 1790 with Haley and Carwardine, the English painter and his friends entertained Greuze and David to dinner, the latter afterwards taking the company to the Luxembourg to study the Marie de Medici series of Rubens. Romney had already made Greuze's acquaintance on the occasion of his previous stay in Paris towards the end of the year 1764, at the very beginning of his career. He had then written to his brother Peter :

"I was very much struck with the strange appearance of things at the first sight. The degeneracy of taste that runs through everything is further gone here than in London. The ridiculous and fantastical are the only points they seem to aim at. The paintings I have yet seen are not much better—I mean by the present masters : but those of the time of Louis the Fourteenth are very great, and every church and palace is filled with them." *

But the English painter learned better before he returned home ; and there can be little doubt that Greuze, at least, had a profound influence on his artistic development. One has but to compare Greuze's *Love's Dream*, for instance, with Romney's *Lady Hamilton as a Bacchante*, to be convinced of the strong analogies between the two painters.

* Quoted by Mr. Humphry Ward in the Biographical Introduction to his *Romney*, Vol. I., 1904.

It may have been David, or, possibly, Madame Roland (remembering the pleasant hours she had spent in the artist's studio before her marriage) who sent many of the revolutionary leaders to Greuze for their portraits. It was a kindly act, whoever was responsible for it; and although the painter had, doubtless, to be contented with much more modest fees than he had been used to when he had all Paris at his feet, he was now only too glad to get any work at all. The Revolutionists were then all good friends and had not yet begun to send each other to the scaffold in the sacred names of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. The methods of the preachers of Universal Brotherhood had not then given occasion for the parodist to cry, "Be my brother, or I'll slay thee!" In those happy days a man could believe, if so it pleased him, in the divine right of kings, without forfeiting his human right to his own head.

Among the best of these portraits are those of Fabre d'Églantine, the dramatist who became the intimate friend of Danton, and perished with him on the scaffold; of Gensonné, the great Girondist orator who also died by the guillotine with most of the other leaders of his party; and of Robespierre, who sent both of them to their deaths. The last of these, a masterly work in every way, is now in the possession of the Marquis of Rosebery. "The Incorruptible" is represented as a neatly dressed young man, with a receding forehead, piercing eyes, pointed nose and chin, slightly pitted with small-pox—a smug face, though by no means an unkindly one. There is abundant evidence that the

likeness is good. The portrait of Gensonné is scarcely inferior to that of Robespierre. The orator is dressed in a black coat, with a white waistcoat and a white cravat. His hair is lightly powdered ; he has a pleasant, good-natured face, and the artist has admirably caught the touch of irresolution in the eyes of his sitter, although he has perhaps scarcely suggested the power of withering sarcasm which made Gensonné the terror of his political opponents.

Fabre d'Églantine is dressed very similarly to Gensonné. He has a round face, with a pink and white complexion which any woman might have envied; he is a handsome fellow, rather haughty, a ladies' man, stamped with the rather fatuous air common to this type ; he has every appearance of being very well satisfied with himself and with things as he finds them. How such a man came to be so fervid a revolutionist, it is difficult to understand. At the time this portrait was painted, Fabre had every reason to be pleased with himself, for two of his comedies, *Le Philinte* and *L'Intrigue Épistolaire*, had just been performed with great applause. His head was perhaps a little turned ; but success is good, it is health-giving like the sunshine and the wind upon the heath, and no artist was ever the worse for it. I dare say there was little harm in Fabre when he sat for this portrait. We can be indulgent.

All three of these portraits are remarkable. They point to the fact that Greuze, even in his old age, was susceptible to new ideas, for the influence of the new school can be clearly traced in them. As M. Charles

FABRE D'ÉGLANTINE

(Louvre, Paris)

*Photo by Lévy et ses frères*



Normand points out, the modelling is sharper, the touch firmer and bolder, the masses better blended; there is, indeed, more solidity than grace in these portraits.*

To this time also belong the portraits of Danton, Dumouriez, Josephine Beauharnais, and Napoleon Bonaparte, each of which has considerable merit, although the three above described are by far the best, and may, indeed, claim to rank among the finest French portraits of the century.

As the Revolution progressed, Greuze lost more and more ground, he became more and more neglected and forgotten. His last years were spent listening for the faint echoes of his dying fame; and the day came, at the height of the Terror, when a small coal dealer bought one of the master's pictures of a girl's head for six liards and fixed it outside his shop by driving a nail through the top of the canvas. Under the painting, the enterprising shopkeeper wrote in chalk the legend: "À la Belle Charbonnière."

Early in 1796 Prud'hon, who, two years before, had been driven from Paris by famine and misery, returned once more to the capital to try his fortune. He immediately paid complimentary visits to his fellow artists. David and Girodet received him rather badly, whilst Greuze alone of all the artists of repute extended a cordial welcome to the young painter, who within a few years was destined to win great fame. With his habitual bluntness Greuze said to him:

"Have you any talent?"

* Normand (Charles), *J.B. Greuze.* 1892.

"Yes," replied the candid Prud'hon.

"So much the worse for you!" said Greuze. "A family depending upon you and talent, that is more than enough to make sure of dying in poverty. What is the use of talent nowadays, when there is neither God nor Devil, neither King nor Court, neither rich nor poor? Why, as you know, I who speak to you am as great a painter as another; but just look at my ruffles!" *

He might well invite Prud'hon to look at them; they were all in tatters; and his clothes were not in much better condition. He still wore the scarlet plush coat, now sadly worn and threadbare, with his sword by his side, just as in his happier days, when he haunted the Gardens of the Palais Royal, the Tuileries and other public resorts, sketching and making notes for pictures.† He continued this practice to the end, but it was rather from habit than because he hoped to sell the pictures he painted from his sketches.

Things came to such a pass that on the 28 Pluviôse, An IX, we find him writing to the Minister of the Interior:

"The picture which I am doing for the Government is half finished. The situation in which I find myself compels me to beg you to give orders for me to receive something on account, in order that I may be enabled to complete the picture. I have had the honour of inform-

* Clément (Charles) *Prud'hon: sa vie, ses œuvres, et sa correspondance.* 1872.

† [Pillet (Fabien)] Personal reminiscences of Greuze in the *Biographie Universelle.*

ing you of all my misfortunes ; I have lost everything, except talent and courage. I am seventy-five years old and have not a single work on order ; in my whole life I have not experienced such hard times. You have a kind heart, and I flatter myself that you will help me in my trouble as soon as you possibly can, for the matter is pressing. With respectful greetings,

"GREUZE." *

The picture here referred to was a life-size nude, entitled *Marie l'Égyptienne*, ordered by Lucien Bonaparte, the Prince de Canino, who had been touched by the misery of the old artist.

Poor Greuze had fallen on hard times, and things showed no sign of improving ; yet he remained as kindly and thoughtful for others as ever. Thus on Madame Vigée Lebrun's return from Russia towards the end of 1801, she wrote in her Memoirs :

" My first visitor next day was Greuze, whom I found unchanged. You would even have said that he had never undressed his hair, for the same locks waved at each side of his head—just as before my departure. I was grateful for his attention, and very glad to see him again." †

But in spite of the neglect of the general public, and the increasing difficulty he experienced in earning his living, it is pleasing to record that sunshine was brought into the old master's last years by the affection-

* Quoted by E. and J. de Goncourt in *L'Art du XVIII^e Siècle*. Greuze.
† Vigée Lebrun (Mme) *Memoirs* ; translated by Lionel Strachey.

ate care of a band of young women pupils. Greuze had devoted his life and his talent to the portraiture of young girls. His brush, more than any other, had extolled their beauty and their grace; they were the constant source of his happiest inspirations. It was, therefore, right and fitting that the master should be surrounded by their love and sympathy in his old age. The fair women who showed the old painter the gratitude of their kind were his daughter, Anne Geneviève, his god-child Caroline, who became Madame de Valori, Madame Jubot, Mademoiselle Le Doux, and Mlle Mayer, the most gifted of all, who afterwards killed herself for the love of her second master, Prud'hon.

Greuze passed the last months of his life in painting portraits of himself and his daughter Anne, and it was generally admitted that his own portrait was the best in the Salon of 1804. The painter desired his daughter to sell this portrait, to help towards the support of her sister and herself. But Anne Geneviève preferred to keep her father's portrait and to sell her own.

Greuze died on Thursday, March 21, 1805. His obituary notice in the *Moniteur*, written by Mirabeau's adopted son Lucas de Montigny, runs thus:

"A scene, as moving as it was unexpected, gave a touch of life to the simplicity of his obsequies. As the body was about to be taken out of the church, to be placed upon the hearse, a young person, whose emotion and tears could be seen beneath the veil which covered her face, approached the coffin. She placed a bouquet of immortelles upon it, and immediately retired to the

PORTRAIT OF A LADY

(Wallace Collection, London)

*Photo by Messrs. W. A. Mansell & Co., London*



back of the church and there continued her prayers. The stems of the flowers in the bouquet were tied together in a paper wrapper, on which was written these words: 'These flowers, offered by his most grateful pupils, are the emblem of his glory.' It was fitting that one woman in the name of all should come and place a tribute of admiration upon the tomb of the artist who, more than any other, had consecrated his labour and his genius to them. This young woman was Mlle Mayer, the pupil of Greuze, and afterwards the friend of Prud'hon."

It may here be mentioned that Mme de Valori, who was probably better informed, states that it was Mme Jubot, not Mlle Mayer, who rendered this last homage to the dead master.

A few days after the artist's death his daughters received the following letter:

"The Commissary of the town of Tournus to the celebrated M. Greuze:

"MONSIEUR,

"On the re-naming of the streets of our town, we had no need to search the pages of history for the names of great men, for your own lives to the glory of Art and the honour of France; it was then natural that the country which saw your birth should be proud of the fact. The street in which your ancestors lived now bears the name of *Greuze*, and in informing you of this fact, I hasten, in the name of my fellow citizens,

to render homage to your talents, to which I should be flattered if you would allow me to add my personal respectful compliments.

"BIDAU."

After their father's death, his daughters earned their living by painting and needlework, and in spite of their poverty, they made it a point of honour to find money enough to keep their father's tomb in order, and to plant it with his favourite flower, the rose. The stone at the head of the grave bears the inscription:

HERE REPOSES

JEAN BAPTISTE GREUZE

DIED THE 21ST MARCH, 1805.
THE RIVAL OF NATURE AND THE PRIDE OF OUR FRANCE,
HE ALWAYS KEPT THE HONOUR OF HIS BRUSH FREE FROM STAIN.
HE PAINTED VIRTUE, FRIENDSHIP, AND INNOCENCE,
AND HIS SOUL BREATHES THROUGH HIS PICTURES.

Louise Gabrielle Greuze died on April 10, 1812, and Anne Geneviève on November 5, 1842.

The death of Greuze came as a surprise to the Parisians. Everybody thought that he had been dead long ago. It is said that when Napoleon heard of the misery of his last years, he exclaimed:

"Why did he not tell me? I would have given him a Sèvres vase full of gold to pay for all his broken pitchers."

It is no injustice to Greuze to say that, in viewing his work as a whole we are struck by his frequent lack of

harmony, the poverty of his imagination, his flat, sleek, and even disagreeable tones. His compositions are always full of action (this is one of his virtues) but they are often theatrical and his figures, instead of being absorbed in what they are about, have an eye on the spectator. Although prodigal in colours, his work, as a whole, lacks colour ; it is sometimes dull, sometimes noisy and garish ; often declamatory and empty. His range was narrowly restricted ; his eyes were sealed to much of that which makes life worth living ; he had little insight into the things of the spirit. Yet, in spite of these limitations, he is in his way inimitable. He has achieved works of surpassing beauty—pictures which delight the eyes not only of those who know nothing about Art, but also of those who know a great deal. Never was a life more ardently consecrated to Art. We feel that Greuze's work is the very highest of which he was capable. He had little but, like the poor widow, he gave all that he had. His works are the complete expression of an incomplete intelligence, and his life is, therefore, a fine example and an inspiration to those artists who came after him. For these reasons Greuze is entitled to the honour and respect of all lovers of the Beautiful.

# LIST OF GREUZE'S EXHIBITS AT THE SALON

## SALON DE 1755

L'Aveugle trompé.
Un Père de Famille qui lit la Bible à ses enfants.
Tête d'après nature.
Portrait de M. Sylvestre, Directeur de l'Académie.
Portrait de M. Lebas, graveur du cabinet du Roi.

## SALON DE 1757

Les Œufs cassés.
Le Geste Napolitain.
La Paresseuse Italienne.
Un Oiseleur accordant sa guitare.
Portrait de Pigalle.
Portrait de M ***, en ovale.
Un Matelot Napolitain.
Un Ecolier qui étudie sa leçon.
Deux Têtes, un petit garçon et une petite fille.
Des Italiens qui jouent à la more. (*A Sketch in Chinese Ink.*)

## SALON DE 1759

Le Repos : Une femme impose silence à son fils en lui montrant les autres enfants qui dorment.
La Simplicité.
La Tricoteuse endormie.
La Dévideuse.
Une Jeune Fille qui pleure la mort de son oiseau.
Portrait de M. de *** jouant de la harpe.
Portrait de Mme la Marquise de *** accordant sa guitare.
Portrait de M ***, docteur de la Sorbonne.

Portrait de Mlle de *** sentant une rose.
Portrait de Mlle Amici en habit de caractère.
Portrait de Babuti, libraire, beau-père de Greuze.
Trois Têtes. (*Studies.*)
Deux Têtes.
Une Tête.
Autre Tête.
Deux Esquisses à l'encre de Chine.

## SALON DE 1761

Portrait de M. le Dauphin.
Portrait de M. Babuti, beau-père de Greuze.
Portrait de M. Greuze peint par lui-même.
Portrait de Mme Greuze en Vestale.
Un Père qui vient de payer la dot de sa fille. (*L'Accordée de Village.*)
La Petite Blanchisseuse.
Un Jeune Berger qui tient un chardon à la main et qui tente le sort pour savoir s'il est aimé de sa bergère.
Une Tête de Nymphe de Diane.
L'Enfant qui boude.
L'Enfant qui se repose sur sa chaise.
Des Enfants qui derobent des marrons. (*Dessin.*)
Le Paralytique. (*Dessin.*)
Le Fermier brûlé. (*Dessin.*)

## SALON DE 1763

La Piété filiale. (*Le Paralytique secouru par ses enfants.*)
Portrait de M. le Duc de Chartres.
Portrait de Mademoiselle.
Portrait de M. le Comte de Lupé.
Portrait de Mlle de Pange.
Portrait de Mme Greuze.
Portrait de M. Watelet.
Une Petite Fille lisant la Croix de Jésus.
Tête de petit garçon.
Tête de petite fille.
Autre tête de petite fille.
Le Tendre Ressouvenir.

## SALON DE 1765

La Jeune Fille qui pleure son oiseau mort.
L'Enfant gâté.
Une Tête de fille.
Une petite fille qui tient un capucin de bois.
Tête de petite fille.
Tête en pastel.
Tête de M. Watelet.
Portrait de Mme Greuze.
Portrait du graveur Wille.
Portrait du sculpteur Caffieri.
Portrait de M. Guibert.
Portrait de Mme Tassart.
Portrait de M. de la Live de Jully.
La Mère Bien-Aimée. (*Esquisse.*)
Le Fils ingrat. (*Esquisse.*)
Le Fils Puni. (*Esquisse.*)
Les Sévreuses. (*Esquisse.*)

## SALON DE 1769

Septime Sévère reproche à Caracalla, son fils, d'avoir attenté à sa vie dans les defilés d'Écosse.
La Mère Bien-Aimée.
La Jeune Fille qui fait sa prière au pied de l'autel de l'Amour.
La Petite Fille en camisole qui tient entre ses genoux un chien noir, avec lequel elle joue.
Portrait du Prince Héréditaire de Saxe-Gotha.
Portrait du peintre Jeaurat.
Portrait de M. de ***.
Trois Têtes d'enfant.
La Mort d'un Père de Famille regretté par ses enfants. (*Dessin.*)
La Mort d'un Père de Famille denaturé abandonné par ses enfants. (*Dessin.*)
L'Avare et ses enfants. (*Dessin.*)
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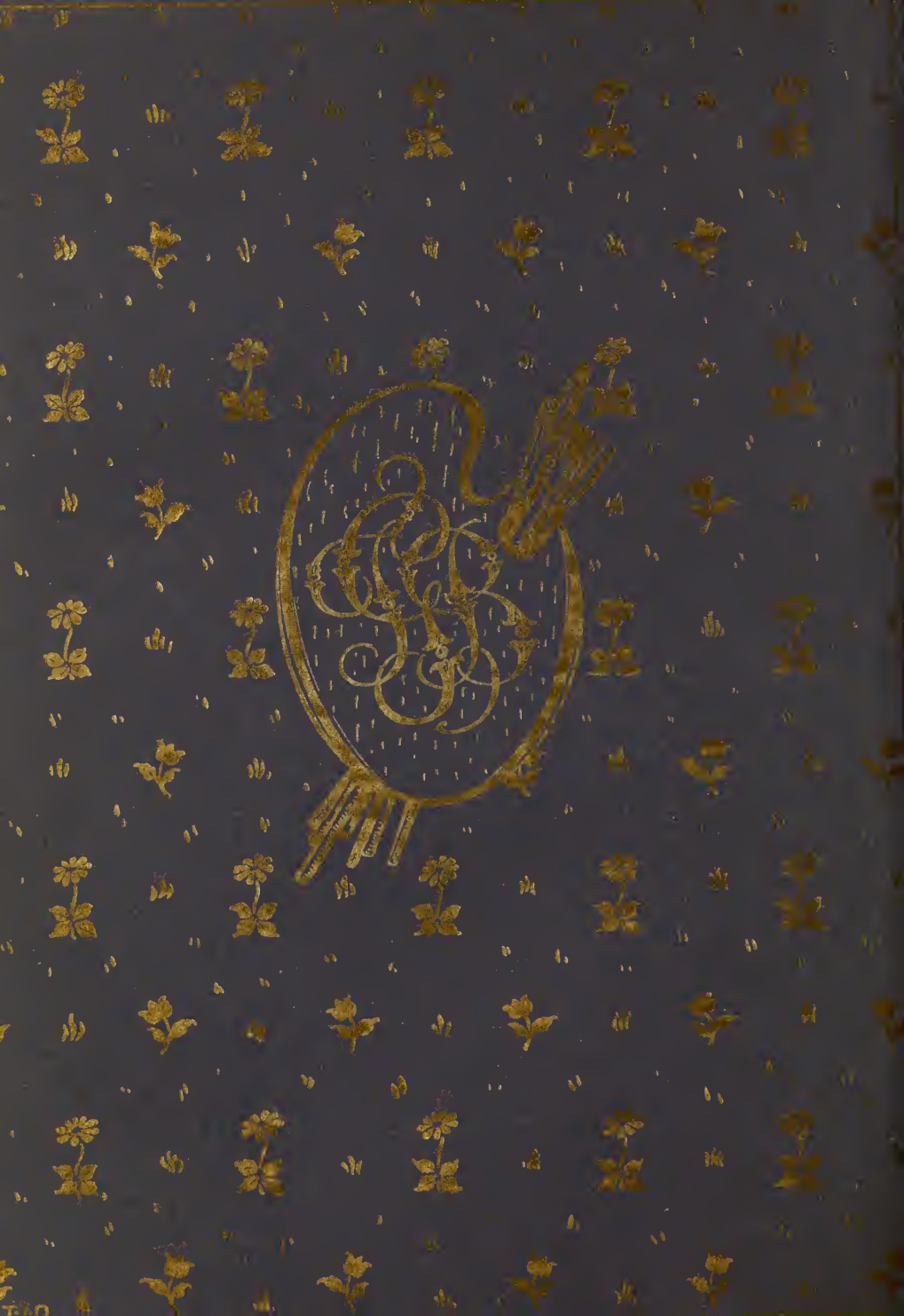
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